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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 26, 1996

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 26, 1996

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Paul Zed (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to six petitions.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development concerning the rights of Canada's aboriginal peoples.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-354, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Young Offenders Act (capital punishment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville for seconding my bill.

On June 21, 1994 I introduced Bill C-265. On March 4, 1996 I introduced Bill C-218 and on May 14 it was granted just one hour of debate. Today I will try yet again.

The government continues to ignore the opinion of the majority of Canadians on the issue of capital punishment for first degree murder. It refuses to hold a binding national referendum to let the people decide.

This bill, were it to come to a true free vote, would be the next best thing if MPs were allowed to vote the view of their constituents, rather than their conscience or their party's position.

In addition to reinstating the death penalty for adults convicted of first degree murder, the bill also imposes a range of stiffer minimum sentences for youths convicted of first degree murder. Too many Canadians have died at the hands of violent criminals who exhibit no remorse for their horrendous crimes. Those individuals will never be rehabilitated no matter how long they remain in prison. In my opinion, breathing is too good for the likes of Clifford Olson and Paul Bernardo.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed.)

* * *

PETITIONS

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Saskatoon—Dundurn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people primarily from the Biggar and Perdue area of Saskatchewan indicating that they wish that the GST be removed from reading materials.

EDUCATION

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to present this petition from a group of Manitobans who object to the constitutional amendment to term 17 of the terms of union between Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador which removes the rights to denominational classes of persons to operate their own schools.

They oppose the removal of constitutionally acquired rights given to minorities so that Newfoundlanders would join Confederation, that is Canada.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions bearing 278 signatures.

The petitioners call on Parliament to enact two strikes legislation requiring everyone who is convicted for the second time of one or more sexual offences against a minor person as defined by the Criminal Code of Canada shall be sentenced to imprisonment for life without eligibility for parole or early release.

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• (1010)

Also, for anyone awaiting trial on any such offences mentioned in this petition, the petitioners pray that such a person be held in lawful custody without eligibility for bail or release of any form until such time as the matter is fully concluded in a Canadian court of law.

GAS PIPELINE

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions, one of which comes from citizens of the province of Nova Scotia.

The petitioners remind the House that in June 1996 the Prime Minister of Canada announced that he would work toward diverting the Sable Island gas pipeline to Quebec City. They state it is unacceptable for the Prime Minister to decide the destination of Nova Scotia natural gas without consulting Nova Scotians, that Nova Scotians assert their right to control the destination of Sable Island gas and demand that the federal government cease tampering in this issue.

NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my second petition asks that the Parliament of Canada declare and confirm immediately that Canada is indivisible and that the boundaries of Canada, its provinces, territories and territorial waters may be modified only by (a) a free vote of all Canadian citizens as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and freedoms, or (b) through the amending formula as stipulated in the Canadian Constitution.

LAND MINES

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a great many petitions from virtually thousands of Canadians. These petitions are in both English and French and have been gathered from across the country.

The petitioners call on Parliament to legislate the prohibition in Canada of the use, production, stockpiling, sale, trade and transfer of all anti-personnel land mines; to work for a international convention banning these activities; to substantially increase Canadian contributions to the UN fund for assistance in mine clearance and to indigenous and other humanitarian mine clearing initiatives; and to increase Canadian funding and other types of assistance to programs to rehabilitate mine victims.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Paul Zed (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.) moved that Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Kilger: Mr. Speaker, there are ongoing discussions between the parties to facilitate the addition of other amendments. I ask that we suspend the sitting for approximately 10 minutes in order to conclude these negotiations before we proceed any further with third reading.

[Translation]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to suspend sitting for ten minutes or more if necessary?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 10.14 a.m.)

[English]

SITTING RESUMED

The House resumed at 10:35 a.m.

Mr. Kilger: Mr. Speaker, there have been additional discussions among the parties and I would like to thank the hon. member for Bellechasse on behalf of the Bloc Quebecois, the hon. member for Calgary West on behalf of the Reform Party and the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona on behalf of the New Democratic Party.

As a result of these discussions I understand that there would be unanimous consent to make a number of additional amendments to Bill C-63 regarding the contents and availability of the list of electors and the minimum period for byelections.

All parties and the table have complete sets of these amendments. I could read each one to the House or the House could take them as read. In any case, I am asking for unanimous consent:

That the House order that the bill be so amended without debate or division.

The Deputy Speaker: I wonder if there is a disposition to give unanimous consent to the motion. I will deal with the question of whether the amendments should be put on the record in a moment.

[Translation]

Do we have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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[English]

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say, with respect to whether unanimous consent should be granted, that the NDP will give its unanimous consent but will do so reluctantly in the sense that this process has not been well executed. It is an obvious case of closure having been moved too soon. The process has been rushed and rushed in such a way that, given the way the speaking roster works here, we have not had a chance to participate in this debate and will not as a result of the process. That will continue to be the case, which is why I wanted to rise on this point of order, to say that we are happy to co-operate in improving the bill but we wish the process had been one in which we had more opportunity to participate.

The Deputy Speaker: I take it that there is unanimous consent.

The other question is whether it would be prudent to put the amendments on the record or whether, if it is a long, complicated list, we should just have them printed in *Hansard*. Is there a disposition to have them deemed read for the record?

Mr. Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I believe there would be a disposition to deem them as having been read. I think you would find that the hon. minister will lead the debate. In fact, the government House leader will be dealing with each amendment in his intervention.

The Deputy Speaker: Then I take it that there is a disposition to deem the amendments as having been read into the record. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed and so ordered by unanimous consent.

(Motion agreed to.)

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas, Lib.) moved:

That Bill C-63 be amended by replacing the long title on page 1 with the following:

“An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act, the Parliament of Canada Act and the Referendum Act”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 1, be amended by replacing line 18 on page 1 with the following:

“surname, given names, civic address”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 1, be amended by replacing line 14 on page 2 with the following:

“given names, civic address and mailing”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 16, be amended by replacing lines 11 and 12 on page 7 with the following:

“information referred to in paragraph (2)(d)”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 18, be amended by replacing lines 34 and 35 on page 8 with the following:

“name, given names, sex and date of birth, and indicating”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 22, be amended by replacing line 27 on page 11 with the following:

“surname, given names, civic address”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 22, be amended by

(a) replacing line 9 on page 13 with the following:

“list contains the surname, given names, sex, date of birth”

(b) replacing line 17 on page 13 with the following:

“(b) his or her surname, given names, sex, date of birth”

(c) replacing lines 22 to 29 on page 13 with the following:

“may invite the person to give any other information that the Chief Electoral Officer considers necessary to implement any agreements entered into under section 71.024, but the person is not required to do so.”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 35, be amended by replacing lines 32 to 41 on page 22 with the following:

“(4) Each returning officer shall deliver to the appropriate deputy returning officers the portions of the lists mentioned in subsections (1) and (2) that they need to conduct the vote in their respective polling divisions, with an indication of the sex of each elector named therein.

(5) Each returning officer shall deliver to each candidate two copies of the lists mentioned in subsections (1) and (2), one being in printed form and one in electronic form.

(6) Where a request is received from a”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 71, be amended by

(a) replacing line 20 on page 35 with the following:

“71.(1) Section 22 of Schedule II to the Act is”

(b) replacing line 22 on page 35 with the following:

“amended by adding the following after paragraph (d):

(d.1) the applicant’s date of birth;

(2) Section 22 of Schedule II to the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (1):”

(c) replacing lines 25 to 32 on page 35 with the following:

“may invite the elector to give any other information that the Chief Electoral Officer considers necessary for implementing agreements made under section 71.024 of the Act, but the elector is not required to give it.”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 74, be amended by

(a) replacing line 6 on page 36 with the following:

“74.(1) Subsection 37(1) of Schedule II to the Act is”

(b) replacing line 8 on page 36 with the following:

“paragraph (b):

(b.1) the elector’s date of birth;

(2) Section 37 of Schedule II to the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (1):”

(c) replacing lines 11 to 18 on page 36 with the following:

“Officer may invite the elector to give any other information that the Chief Electoral Officer considers necessary for implementing agreements made under section 71.024 of the Act, but the elector is not required to give it.”;

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That Bill C-63, in Clause 77, be amended by replacing lines 42 and 43 on page 36 with the following:

“tor’s surname, given names, sex and date of birth, and the”;

That Bill C-63, in Clause 78, be amended by replacing lines 8 and 9 on page 37 with the following:

“(b) the date of birth;”;

That Bill C-63 be amended by adding after line 4 on page 40 the following:

“87.1 Subsection 31(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act is replaced by the following:

31. (1) Where a vacancy occurs in the House of Commons, a writ shall be issued between the 11th day and the 180th day after the receipt by the Chief Electoral Officer of the warrant for the issue of a writ for the election of a member of the House.”;

That Bill C-63 be amended by adding after line 36 on page 42 the following:

“93.1 Within 30 days after the day on which the notice mentioned in subsection 71.003 of the Canada Elections Act, as enacted by subsection 21(1) of this Act, is published in the Canada Gazette, the Chief Electoral Officer shall, on request by a registered party, provide the registered party with an electronic copy of the list of electors.”.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to support third reading of this bill.

In the light of the discussion which has just taken place, I would like to put on the record some information about the amendments which have just been agreed to. May I suggest that, if it is the will of the House, this could well be material which could be printed as an appendix to *Hansard* or as an appendix to the record of today’s proceedings.

In any event, I would like to provide the following information about the amendments which we have just been discussing.

The first item I would like to address is the matter of obtaining date of birth information about electors. An elector will be asked to provide his or her date of birth by enumerators during the last enumeration. This information will be particularly helpful in identifying and matching electors where addresses change. However, the date of birth information would only appear on the register, that is to say the permanent voters list maintained by the chief electoral officer and not on the list prepared from the register. This means that political parties and candidates will not receive date of birth information.

• (1040)

Then there is the amendment about using gender information about voters. Elections Canada will continue to gather this information during the last enumeration, which I will be discussing, and during both the annual updating process and during the revision

period of an election. This information will contribute to the accuracy of voter identification.

Gender information, however, will not be shared with parties or candidates. It will be information retained internally by Elections Canada to be shared with poll clerks for elections and with provincial elections officials if their legislation requires this information.

Then there is an amendment about sharing the preliminary voters lists with parties. The bill provides that parties would receive an updated voters list each October 15. However, we have agreed to an amendment which means that registered parties will receive a preliminary voters list after the last door to door enumeration, which I will be discussing in my speech. The list will be made available within 30 days after the chief electoral officer gives notice in the *Canada Gazette* that the information is complete. This is a transitional measure.

Of course, if an election is called sooner, the list will be available five days after the writ is issued.

Finally, there is an amendment we have agreed to about byelections. This amendment will mean that byelections can be held no sooner than 47 days after the writ for the byelection has been issued so that the minimum period for an election campaign under the present law will continue to be 47 days for byelections. This will give opposition parties more time to prepare to take part in the byelections and is in response to a concern in that regard which we have all agreed to deal with through this amendment.

[Translation]

Now, as I have just said, I am pleased to rise in support of the third reading of Bill C-63. I would first thank the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for their diligence and the relevance of their observations, because the amendments they proposed are very valuable, and I would like to discuss them.

[English]

I also want to thank other members who have not taken part in the work of the committee, particularly members of the New Democratic Party, for their consideration of amendments which I have mentioned and other amendments which were incorporated into the bill and voted on during report stage.

At its heart this bill modernizes key elements of our electoral system. We need a contemporary, cost efficient system that allows for intergovernmental co-operation and builds on the latest technologies. We need a system that is cost effective and yet at the same time helps ensure that the high voter turnout which has been typical of our federal elections continues to be the case. I think this is something important for the health of our democratic system of government.

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I submit that the bill, particularly with the amendments which have been proposed during the committee process and those which we have agreed to today, will help us ensure the achievement of these objectives.

The bill has four key elements. It provides for the shortening of the general electoral period from a minimum of 47 days to a minimum of 36 days, beginning with the next general election.

Second, it provides for one last door to door enumeration to take place prior to the next election to provide both the preliminary voters list within five days of the call of the next election and also to provide the basis for a permanent electoral list based on a permanent register of electors.

• (1045)

Third, the bill provides for the creation of a permanent register of electors intended to be used for the general election and all general elections after the next one.

Finally, the bill proposes changes in voting hours which, through a procedure committee amendment, would establish a voting day schedule that responds to concerns on the part of many western Canadians.

I would like to emphasize the considerable and necessary work that preceded the introduction of this bill. Over the course of several years, beginning with the work of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, otherwise known as the Lortie commission, and the work of the Standing Committee on Electoral Reform, many elements of this bill were explored.

The Lortie commission conducted an extensive study of the voter registration system that benefited from much and varied input. This work was complemented by that of Elections Canada over several years, sometimes in conjunction with provincial counterparts and sometimes in conjunction with the procedure and House affairs committee or its predecessor. This has all been necessary work in the ongoing process of modernizing our electoral system and had to be completed before this bill could be introduced because it provided the foundation, the basis for this bill. The chief electoral officer and his staff had worked on the register project for some two years before this bill was introduced and during this two year period briefed the procedure and House affairs committee on several occasions.

As I have noted there would be one final nationwide enumeration conducted prior to the next election using traditional door to door procedures. The timing of this enumeration means Canada could move to a shorter minimum campaign period, one of 36 days, in time for the next election.

The 1991 royal commission, the Lortie commission, expressed the view that Canadians would favour a shortened electoral period. In the words of the commissioners, lengthy elections produced the most evident criticism among the intervenors. The merits of the shortened campaign I think we should know gained much editorial support in the days following the introduction of this bill.

The chief electoral officer has stated it would be feasible to launch this last enumeration by April 1, 1997 and complete it within 21 to 25 days. After its completion, the final enumeration would be used to produce the preliminary list of electors for the next general election. Candidates would receive the preliminary list within five days of the issuance of the writs.

As I have said, through an amendment, neither the campaign period lists nor the annual list for parties would identify the gender of voters. This information would be kept internal to Elections Canada and federal poll officials and provided, if required, to provincial elections officials.

It is the quick availability of this preliminary list and future lists that makes it feasible to reduce the electoral period from a minimum of 47 days to a minimum of 36 days. I stress that even so, parties and candidates would have a week longer to campaign using the preliminary lists than is the case now with the minimum 47 day campaign.

Through a committee amendment accepted by the House there will be more certainty as to when Canada moves to this shorter campaign calendar. The amendment provides that the chief electoral officer could not conduct the one last enumeration I have mentioned until April 1, 1997. This enumeration would take a total of 21 to 25 days. Once it is completed, the Prime Minister could take steps leading to the issuance of a writ for a general election based on the 36 day campaign. Of course an election could be called earlier but it would be under the current 47 day minimum calendar.

A shortened campaign also means a change to the time frame within which parties must advise broadcasters of the hours and schedule for the advertising time they wish to purchase. Another committee amendment adopted by the House during report stage ensures parties will have a rolling window of up to 10 days after the writs are issued to file their advertising plans even though the minimum election period is reduced to 36 days. This change will be of obvious benefit both to political parties and to broadcasters.

• (1050)

When we enter the next election period there will be another significant change because of an amendment made in committee which was adopted by this House during report stage. The schedule of voting hours will be revised to respond to the concerns of

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western Canadians about when the results of voting in the east are available in the west.

The polls will close at different times across the country after a longer period for voting. The local times to close the polls would be 8.30 p.m. in Newfoundland and in the remaining Atlantic provinces; 9.30 p.m. in Quebec and Ontario; 8.30 p.m. in Manitoba and Saskatchewan; 7.30 p.m. in Alberta and the Northwest Territories; and 7 p.m. in British Columbia and the Yukon. The voting day in each time zone would run for 12 hours. Canadians would have to be given three consecutive hours of time off from work to vote instead of four as it is at present.

This amendment strikes a sensible and a practical balance on voting hours in a country that spans six time zones. The new hours minimize the inconvenience to voters and polling staff and reduce the prospect that British Columbians would still be voting when preliminary results from the east suggest the outcome of the general election.

I wish to note that the permanent register of electors will begin to be built through the enumeration, the one last enumeration, conducted before the next election. Enumerators will ask electors to provide their full name, gender, address and to confirm they are 18 years of age or older and are Canadian citizens.

As I mentioned in my speech on second reading, after this enumeration, Elections Canada would continue its work with the provinces and territories to secure data to be used to build up the register and of course for the annual update. Elections Canada, and again I outlined this in an earlier stage of debate, would continue to work with Revenue Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This work would likely be completed by the late summer or early fall of 1997 which would allow the first annual distribution of the lists based on the permanent register of electors by October 15.

What are some other positive aspects of this bill? The permanent register of electors would be maintained and kept election ready by Elections Canada. It would keep the list current by drawing on certain federal and provincial data sources which as I have said I outlined in earlier stages of debate.

Once the writs are issued for an election there will also be a more streamlined revision process during the electoral period to ensure that all Canadians have the opportunity to have their names on the voting lists and to be able to vote. Of course I am obviously talking about eligible Canadians. Enhanced revision would include targeted door to door enumeration in areas of known high mobility, the use of mail out, mail back revision cards, enhanced public information campaigns and conveniently located voter registration booths.

The register project also supports the goal of improved federal-provincial co-operation and the reduction of overlap and duplication.

As a result of an amendment made in committee again adopted in this House during report stage, the chief electoral officer will be able to use provincial lists both to build and maintain the federal register. Certain conditions would apply to the use of such lists to ensure the accuracy and quality of the federal register. The amendment allows the use of provincial lists for this purpose if the provincial lists are recent, completed within 12 months of the date of the last door to door federal enumeration called to build the register, and the provincial lists meet the requirements of the federal chief electoral officer for federal enumerations.

This amendment likely means that the list of electors in Prince Edward Island and Alberta could be used next spring to build the federal register since I understand that in the view of the chief electoral officer they would likely meet these requirements. It would therefore not be necessary to have a federal door to door enumeration in these two provinces.

• (1055)

I should note that public opinion research demonstrates that Canadians support the concept of a register and lists built upon it. They are particularly attracted to the register's convenience, cost savings and prospects for better federal-provincial co-operation in electoral administration.

At this point I want to make some considerations about the register quite clear.

The existence of a register of electors would not prevent a citizen from exercising his or her constitutionally protected right to vote.

The bill respects electors' privacy and takes steps to ensure the confidentiality of their personal information by insisting on the active consent of a citizen for information about that person to be provided from federal taxation and citizenship sources. As well and as a result of an amendment made in committee, again adopted during report stage here in the House, the bill now obliges the chief electoral officer to change any voter information upon proper request from the voter.

In addition the bill now states that information shared with a province can only be used by it for electoral purposes. This limitation would be stipulated in any information sharing agreement with a province. The proposed bill which we are now debating also makes it clear who would be entitled to receive copies of the list based on the permanent register of electors and that the list would have to be confined to electoral purposes as defined in the bill.

I also want to say that another amendment which we have adopted and which was first made in committee would mean parties receive the updated register, or to put it another way, the

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lists based on the register by October 15 of each year rather than November 15 as originally foreseen.

Elections Canada can update the register using the critical and most current voter information provided by Revenue Canada and other data suppliers before sharing lists based on the register with parties. For its part Revenue Canada will provide information based on the most recent income tax forms.

The House will recall that I said at an earlier stage of debate that there would have to be a positive indication, that is a marking in a box on the income tax form, by electors that they are willing to have certain information from their income tax files shared with Elections Canada.

I have also pointed out that there would be no interconnection of computers between Elections Canada and Revenue Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Instead, the data would have to be hand carried in the form of disks or tapes over to Elections Canada, a further protection with respect to the privacy of the voter.

It is worth noting again that there has been considerable support for this bill by editorial writers. Generally editorialists in a number of cities across the country welcome the key elements of the bill, as well as the safeguards for the protection of personal information and cost savings inherent in the proposed changes.

[*Translation*]

By way of conclusion, I would like to point out that Bill C-63 will result in a number of major changes to our electoral system. It will enable us to modernize the system, improve intergovernmental co-operation, reduce the risk of overlap, realize considerable savings and further protect voters' rights.

[*English*]

Let me say a word about the savings to taxpayers. This bill if adopted would mean that there would be savings to taxpayers of some \$30 million for each election once the lists based on a permanent register of electors were in use. Some \$8 million of savings are included in this \$30 million which are brought about by the shorter election period. Just having the shorter election period itself would save taxpayers some \$8 million for each election.

I conclude by asking for the approval of this bill in this House by way of third reading. It comes to us after considerable debate in committee with amendments which the government has been happy to recommend to the House for approval, as well as amendments that were made just at the last minute. I again thank all members of the House for their indulgence in allowing these changes to be made, which reflect further proposals which I think make this a better bill.

This is a good bill in the interests of all Canadians and I again ask for its support on third reading.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, for the last time, we will debate at third reading Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, the Parliament of Canada Act and the Referendum Act.

It is with great disappointment that the official opposition found itself caught in this spiral that kept winding faster and faster as time went by.

My remarks will bear the stamp of civility while at the same time revealing a deep flaw, a major deficiency in the system for drafting and adopting electoral legislation.

Before starting my speech, I want to thank the chief government whip, the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas, for his excellent work on this issue although he was pitched into his new position as the chief government whip at the last minute to participate in a debate whose direction I feel eluded him. So, none of what I am about to say is directed at him personally.

However, I have been on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs since the very beginning of this Parliament, in January 1994. At the time, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was chaired by our colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, who is now the Deputy Chairman of Committees of the Whole.

Over the weeks, months and years that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs worked together, a relationship of trust was built that spread to every member of the committee. On many occasions, both the government and the opposition went the extra mile to achieve a consensus. Very seldom, since the beginning of the 35th Parliament, have we in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs needed to take a vote. Generally, we would come to an agreement or, where unanimity was not possible, we would deal with matters at hand in such depth that the stakes were clear. No one came out feeling someone had—pardon the expression—pulled a fast one on them; all the ins and outs of the matter were on the table, and the way proceedings at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs were rushed during the first session of the 35th Parliament was not justified.

To show you how much things have changed, let me explain to you how things were done. You probably remember, because it was debated at such length in this House, Bill C-69 to amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. How was this bill developed in a non-partisan manner? And look how long it took.

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First, on March 17, 1994, the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tabled in this House an order of reference that was debated. The order of reference read as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill, in accordance with Standing Order 68(5), respecting the system of readjusting the boundaries of electoral districts for the House of Commons by Electoral Boundaries Commissions, and, in preparing the said bill, the committee be instructed to consider, among other related matters, the general operation over the past thirty years of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, including:

- (a) a formula to cap or reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons;
- (b) a review of the adequacy of the present method of selection of members of Electoral Boundary Commissions;
- (c) a review of the rules governing and the powers and methods of proceeding of Electoral Boundary Commissions, including whether those Commissions ought to commence their work from the basis of making necessary alterations to the boundaries of existing electoral districts wherever possible;
- (d) a review of the time and nature of the involvement of the public and the House of Commons in the work of Electoral Boundary Commissions;

That the committee have the power to travel within Canada and to hear witnesses by teleconference; and

That the committee report no later than December 16, 1994.

● (1105)

The order of reference proposed by the government House leader was adopted on Tuesday, April 19, 1994. This is an important date to remember. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs subsequently held meetings on the following dates in 1994: June 7, 9, 14 and 21; July 5, 6 and 7; September 27 and 29; October 4, 20 and 25; and November 1, 3, 15, 17 and 22. Following this, the committee tabled in the House Bill C-69, which was read for the first time on February 16, 1995. Second reading took place on February 25, 1995, while third reading was on April 25, 1996. The Senate passed the bill on June 8, 1995.

Taking into account only the process that took place in this House, a notice was given by the government House leader on March 17, 1994, and the bill finally passed third reading on April 25, 1995, more than 13 months after the House was notified.

The official opposition expected the same process. It expected the government to have the House pass an order of reference instructing the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to hold hearings and to prepare a bill on the establishment of a permanent register of electors for all of Canada.

We did some preliminary work anticipating that such an order would come. We listened to the people from Elections Canada, who came to tell us about certain theories, certain possibilities with

respect to drawing up a permanent list and changing polling station hours in western Canada and the rest of the country.

The last hearing we had, in fact, was on April 30, when Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, came to make his last presentation and told us that he had to have legislation in place before the summer recess, before the end of June, so that it could be in effect for the next election. Thereafter, the official opposition was given no information whatsoever on developments.

What happened, while we were waiting in vain for an order of reference from the government? We honestly believed that the government had simply abandoned the idea of drawing up a permanent list of voters in the short term. The next thing we learned came not from the chairman of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, not through a government order in the House, but in the form of a telephone call I received in the afternoon of October 3 from Geneviève Rossier, a Radio-Canada journalist, asking me what I thought of the bill that was going to be tabled. Between April 30 and October 3, my information came from Radio-Canada. It is just a little frustrating for a parliamentarian to learn from Radio-Canada and CBC as well that a bill concerning the establishment of a voters list is going to be tabled.

Radio-Canada's 11 o'clock evening news confirmed that Mrs. Rossier had been right on the mark, because her interview with Mr. Kingsley and with the Leader of the Government in the House made it clear that a bill was in the offing.

● (1110)

Subsequently, the bill was tabled here in the House, for referral to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs before second reading. In fact, it was to be rushed through this committee with undue haste, so much so that it was actually difficult to follow the debate.

I submit that in a non-partisan matter that should have led to wide-ranging consultations across Canada on establishing a permanent list of electors, a fundamental amendment to the Canada Elections Act, we should have sought the broadest possible consensus.

As this debate draws to a close, I repeat that if today's vote were to show that the government does not have substantial support among the opposition parties, this bill should simply be withdrawn. It would not make sense and in fact it would be risky to go into an election when a bill to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act is passed by the only party that has a majority. I say this because the Canada Elections Act does not exist for the benefit of one party or all parties, although they are affected by this

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legislation. This legislation is above all important to the voters we represent.

The partisan approach to the consideration of this bill in committee, and all the murky circumstances around its tabling—I will get back to that in a minute—argue against the government going ahead if it does not enjoy substantial support from the opposition parties. The government and those who will be asked to take a second look at this bill will have to consider the following question: How was it passed?

Of course, there are a number of factors that could explain, not excuse, the present situation. The first session of the 35th Parliament was prorogued. A new session started last March. All parliamentary secretaries were replaced, including the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands who was Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House. Here was a man of consensus, a team worker who had managed to make the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs a non-partisan committee. His successor had to take over the committee in circumstances he was probably not able to control entirely and with an agenda that was not his own. I am not pointing the finger at him, but when all of the parliamentary secretaries are changed from one day to the next, there are major side effects.

The most important one is that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs ended up with a chair who had no prior knowledge of the operations of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. He will learn in time, of course, but at a point when legislation involving the election process was being worked on by the members of that committee, there seems to have been no continuity in the chairmanship.

This is a direct link. If I remember correctly—and I stand to be called to order if my information is not correct—procedure and House affairs is the only committee headed by a parliamentary secretary. He is linked directly to the minister responsible for election legislation. The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is linked directly with his minister, who ought normally to know where the government is headed in terms of the Elections Act.

Another unfortunate event beyond our control, and one which may well explain part of the situation, is the illness of the hon. Leader of the Government in this House. Obviously, when a man of this calibre, with all of his wealth of knowledge of this institution, has to take time off to recuperate and get back on his feet, the cabinet is missing a key element. We have all noted the effects the absence of the hon. member for Windsor West has had on the government. Far be it from me to criticize his behaviour in any way, but it is a factor to be considered. I quickly and carefully looked at the events that could have affected the consideration of this bill and how it was dealt with.

• (1115)

The consensus I spoke of earlier was at the time—and I refer to last spring—that we would have an order of reference to enable the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to draft a bill.

This would involve the committee's hearing witnesses; asking them questions; hearing people in videoconferences; doing simulations involving, for example, the opening of polls; meeting people from British Columbia to ask them what this means to them; having the broadest possible discussions so as to have the information needed, perhaps not for a consensus, but to know what is in the bill so that each member of the committee can say why a given comma is where it is.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs prepared 23 drafts of Bill C-69. Twenty-three drafts were produced; the three parties were present. The Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party were there for each of the 23 drafts. The changes made in the formulation of Bill C-69 were at the request of one or the other of the parties. Some even felt that we had taken too long. There is no such thing as too much time when one wants to do a good job. We produced an excellent bill that was both well drafted and easy to understand.

The official opposition voted against the bill, but knowing what was in it. We voted against it for one main reason: it did not retain as a criterion a 25 per cent minimum representation for Quebec. In fact, Bill C-69 should be reintroduced to be passed again so that it could apply to a subsequent Parliament. As for the rest, we know the bill inside out since all the parties have worked on it for more than a year.

For reasons best known to themselves, Reformers also voted against the bill. It was easy for them to speak to the bill since they were already familiar with its content.

Today, it is quite another story. Not only did the committee not develop the bill, not only was it obviously instructed to go full steam ahead, but we now find ourselves at the last minute with amendments to be tabled.

Perhaps some of this can be explained by the fact that Elections Canada resigned—this is an interesting slip of the tongue. It did not resign, its offices were moved from Telesat Court to Slater Street. Also, from time to time, they are seen in the Liberal Party's lobby, which we find disturbing.

Elections Canada's attitude on this issue is bizarre. I mentioned earlier that Mr. Kingsley had appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on April 30. In his testimony, he said that, if we wanted to establish a permanent

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voters list, we should do so before the summer recess, which was not done.

The question I asked myself then and still ask myself now is: Did Elections Canada lose faith in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and stop dealing with this committee, which is responsible for electoral issues, preferring to go directly to the government, or did the reverse happen? Is it the government that lost faith in the committee, because it was not proceeding quickly enough and thus decided to rely on Elections Canada? We still do not know.

Given the nature of the situation, there is an element of doubt. Some trust will have to be re-established, because it was destroyed. Members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs have a right to wonder whether Elections Canada played a double role.

• (1120)

Since we did not get answers, because the answers provided by Elections Canada officials who testified before the committee were vague in many respects, we have reasons to believe that the situation was foggy, to say the least, as regards relations between Elections Canada and the government's legislative body, that is to say, us, and its executive branch, which is the cabinet. Indeed, all these questions remain.

I do hope, and I am optimistic given the quality of the people working for Elections Canada, that these bridges can be rebuilt. However, I ask Elections Canada officials to be very cautious when they have to deal with both the legislative and the executive powers. The principle that no one can serve two masters at the same time is even more important in the case of legislation such as the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act.

These were our observations on the form. Let us now look at the content as such. First, we are told, as regards the establishment of a permanent voters list, that the bill is essential because it will allow us to create such a list. I believe all the members of this House who spoke on the issue support the principle of a permanent voters list and a shorter election campaign that would last 36 days instead of 47.

I encountered very little opposition to the principle from any party, but then there is a second question: When will the permanent list of voters be ready? The list the government is talking about will not be ready for the next election, and will not be used to elect the 301 members of the 36th Parliament. Barring an early election, in the case of a minority government, that list will be ready for the election of the 37th Parliament, a good 6 or 7 years from now. This is the bill we are debating under emergency procedures, and with time allocation yesterday, without in-depth debate by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and also without in-depth debate during consideration at report stage yesterday, and at second reading, not that there actually was one, and today, again under time allocation, at third reading.

Why rush through legislation that will be used only 6 or 7 years from now? That is the real question. The question is not whether or not we want a permanent list. Of course we do. But not at any cost, and certainly not in such a headlong rush.

They could very well have waited and gone with the principle that the next election campaign would operate under the existing legislation, but that the enumeration for the next election would be the last door-to-door enumeration, that the data gathered for the election of the next Parliament would form the basis of a permanent list of voters, that would then be used in 6 or 7 years' time to elect the 37th Parliament. That was the only amendment we really needed: authorize Canada's chief electoral officer to use the next enumeration done during an election campaign, and after the writs are issued, authorize him to use this list as the basis for drawing up his permanent list of voters.

Instead, we have a bill with a multitude of provisions: it tries to cover everything and falls miserably short. Consequently, we find ourselves faced with a bill most members of this House are not very familiar with, since we have not had the time to go into what it is really all about, all of its objectives, or how it intends to attain them, but I will address a few points. In principle, yes, a permanent electors list, because the tools are there, the computer possibilities are there, the data banks are there to establish one.

• (1125)

We are no longer in the horse and buggy age, we are in the age of the Internet, with easily accessible data banks on voters. Let a permanent list be drawn up, then, but not in the way Bill C-63 proposes.

Second, we have raised the question of the terminology used in Bill C-63, the fact that Bill C-63 and the Elections Act in general speak of "*résidence ordinaire*" or "main residence", as the qualification for voting in a given riding.

This concept of "main residence" is a concept of common law. It is not a concept in Quebec civil law. I respect this notion in common law. Its application to the provinces operating under common law is most understandable, but as far as Quebec is concerned, where we have had a codification of our French legal customs since 1866, the concept of "main residence" is not an acceptable one. In Quebec, the concept of "domicile" is what must be used.

Am I surprised by this? Yes and no. Let us recall that on November 29, 1995, the Right Hon. Prime Minister tabled a resolution before this House concerning recognition of Quebec as a distinct society.

What does that motion say?

That

Whereas the people of Quebec have expressed the desire for recognition of Quebec's distinct society;

- (1) the House recognize that Quebec is a distinct society within Canada;
- (2) the House recognize that Quebec's distinct society includes its French-speaking majority, unique culture and civil law tradition;
- (3) the House undertake to be guided by this reality;
- (4) the House encourage all components of the legislative and executive branches of government to take note of this recognition and be guided in their conduct accordingly.

And the motion was passed by the Liberal majority in this House.

There is an order from the House encouraging "all components of the legislative and executive branches of government to take note of this recognition" of the distinct society. It is also an order to law editors to take note that there is a society based on the French civil code in Canada and that society is in Quebec. When our law editors write a text in which they use the terms "main residence" or "résidence ordinaire", they are in fact infringing on an order of the House instructing them to take note of the fact that Quebec is a distinct society.

During the debate on November 29, 1995, we said that the government was just paying lip service to this concept when it said it would recognize the distinct society. Today we have proof positive. Even the law clerks in the Privy Council and at the Department of Justice failed to take into consideration the concept of "domicile" which is used in Quebec in accordance with the civil code and goes back to 1866, Quebec having legislative authority in this area pursuant to sub-section 92(13) of the *British North America Act, 1867*. This power is not recent. It has been around since well before November 29, 1995. In fact, it goes back to well before 1876, because it was in the custom of Paris which we codified in 1866.

That being said, we had no illusions on November 29, when the government rushed in with a motion recognizing Quebec as a distinct society. The hon. member for Calgary West raised a few questions yesterday about this distinct society. Perhaps I could take a few minutes to explain what distinct society means, because everyone talks about distinct society but is not necessarily referring to the same thing.

There is the distinct society of November 29, 1995, which means nothing at all. There is the distinct society of Charlottetown, which is equally meaningless. And there was the distinct society of Meech Lake, remember, the one that was supposed to mean something but was never ratified because two legislatures, Manitoba and Newfoundland, refused to give their consent.

• (1130)

What was the meaning of distinct society in the Meech Lake accord? It meant that Canada's Constitution would have a section

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with priority over sections 91 and 92, essentially, the two sections dealing with the distribution of powers between the provinces and the federal government.

In other words, one section would be above these two and would indicate to the courts that they were to interpret sections 91 and 92 of the Canadian Constitution in light of the fact that Quebec must, in order to meet its objectives, have more powers than the other provinces.

That is the distinct society in the Meech Lake accord. It was not the November 29 one, nor the Charlottetown one, it was the Meech Lake one. I am sure the hon. member for Calgary West, even though he did not share the intentions we had at the time for the distinct society, understood very well, since he and his colleagues explained the meaning of distinct society at the time quite well to their electors in western Canada: a section establishing a special status and entirely distinct and different powers for Quebec.

Even that was denied. Two legislatures abstained from ratifying it. Even the 1987 Meech Lake accord was rejected. That was a pity.

On the other hand, it made it possible to get at the heart of the issue. Like the present bill, the Meech Lake accord was concluded behind closed doors. People were not consulted in their communities pretty much throughout the country. It was an agreement between 11 first ministers who tried to have their legislatures ratify, without public consultation, without a referendum, the new system of law wanted for Canada.

Since then, it has somehow become customary, in constitutional affairs, to consider referenda as the norm in Canada. We experienced it in Charlottetown, we experienced it in Quebec last October 30, and we will experience it again one day on the same issue, in circumstances which, this time, should be more favourable.

This bill goes further than the Meech Lake accord, because it is important to recall what happened in Meech Lake. The Bloc Québécois, the official opposition, is the result of the failure of the Meech Lake accord. If the Meech Lake accord had been ratified by Manitoba and by the Newfoundland Legislative Assembly, we would not be here today. We are the result of the failure of the Meech Lake accord.

The leader of the Bloc Québécois, Mr. Bouchard, left the government following the failure of the Meech Lake accord, because the hon. member for Sherbrooke, who still sits in this House, wanted to water it down. It was at that moment. We came very close to an agreement which, it seems, would have been enough for a majority of Quebecers at the time. This would not have been the case for several members of the Bloc who, because of their sovereignist convictions, felt that the accord did not go far enough, but a magic bond was formed at that time.

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When the Meech Lake accord failed, Quebecers of all political stripes—members of the Liberal Party, the Parti Québécois and other, less representative political movements—rallied behind the notion of distinct society in the Meech Lake accord, a notion that no one defends any more.

The bill mentions the use of some lists of electors. So, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada will be allowed to hold an enumeration. This will probably take place next April if the bill is passed by the House and the Senate. For approximately three weeks, the Chief Electoral Officer may send people door to door to do an enumeration. In some provinces, he may also make arrangements with provincial electoral officers. This will certainly be the case in Alberta and Prince Edward Island, where programs and lists have been established with the help of Elections Canada as part of a joint project with the provinces.

As for British Columbia and Quebec, since we represent the people of Quebec, Quebec's lists will neither be used nor usable. One of the amendments put forward in committee, without specifically naming any province, excludes the use of Quebec's permanent list for the purposes of Bill C-63. This list will be available as of next May 1, that is, in the days following the end of the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate. Why? Because a little technical, harmless-looking amendment says that a provincial list may be used provided the door-to-door enumeration was conducted in the previous 12 months. In Quebec, however, the enumeration used to establish a permanent list was done in September 1995, whereas the list itself will be ready and completely up-to-date May 1. Since these two events are more than 12 months apart, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada cannot use the list of electors.

• (1135)

And yet the list will be established using taxpayers' money, those same taxpayers who paid for the establishment of the permanent list in Quebec and for the expertise of those who established it, and they will have to watch as enumerators do it all over again, when we could have had just one list using the same data base. We have only to redistribute voters according to the proper ridings. This is feasible; Quebec does it for municipal elections where districts are different. We have only to exchange information and communicate, and we will be able to use Quebec's list.

Savings would exceed \$15 to \$20 million; we are not talking about \$10,000. Or even the cost to reprint an amended bill. Savings would be significant. At a time when everybody is asked to tighten their belt, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada is not allowed to use Quebec's electoral list, or British Columbia's for that matter.

My colleagues will raise other points. For my part, I am going to deal with the issue of polling hours. Bill C-63 contains clauses

providing for the staggering of polling hours across Canada. As a result, polling stations in the east will stay open later. For instance, in Ottawa, polling stations will stay open until 9.30 p.m., whereas in British Columbia they will stay open until 7 p.m.

There has been no trial run. What appears in Bill C-63 has not even been submitted by Elections Canada to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as a working assumption. They pulled this out of a hat and this is the rabbit we got. The trick was that we did not know.

Yesterday, during debate, I listened to my colleagues from central Canada who, much more than I, will be affected by the change, and the closing of polls at nine thirty did not seem to represent a major change for them; for British Columbia however, closing the polls at seven means a very major change. Yesterday, the members for Surrey—White Rock—South Langley and Saanich—Gulf Islands mentioned all the drawbacks this measure could cause.

The member for Surrey—White Rock—South Langley said that many constituents from the town of Surrey and the vicinity, who work in Vancouver and finish working at five or five thirty, will not make it back to their riding in time to vote if the polls close at seven. That is a serious problem.

I think we should put aside the section on the polling hours and, since there is no need to hurry, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should study Bill C-307 presented by the member for Vancouver East and hear witnesses, like the people from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Atlantic region, to find out what they think.

How will that measure be applied in real life? Will we have to allow advance voting for 10,000 people in each riding? This is of serious concern to us. We ask the government to reconsider that provision and to allow Bill C-307 to be studied further since we have sufficient time to deal with this before the start of the next election campaign.

The last point also concerns the polling hours. Not only are we reducing the number of hours for the polls, we are also reducing from 4 to 3 the minimum number of hours that employers will have to give their employees for the vote.

• (1140)

If we remove the busiest hours, what we could call the golden hours of polling, we will have problems, because most people do not vote in the morning, at lunch time or early in the afternoon, but right after work. Yet, what we are saying to the people in Surrey, Langley, Vancouver, Squamish, and even in Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta is: "You will have to vote much earlier, or else you will not have time to go to the polling station". What is the voter

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going to do? What are members of electoral organizations going to do? They will have to work like mad to let people vote in advanced polls, they will be pulling their hair out on election day, because they will not have enough time.

What I am saying is that we did not think long enough about the opening hours of polling stations and I believe we would be better off keeping the present system for one more election rather than rushing into something that will make people who are unable to take time off work feel disenfranchised. We are trying to deal with a problem, but coming up with a cure which is worse than the disease.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today at third reading of Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, the Referendum Act and the Parliament of Canada Act.

[*Translation*]

In speaking on behalf of the Reform Party, I intend to oppose this bill that imposes changes to the federal elections act without the consent of the opposition parties. These changes are not necessary and they are also dangerous to the operation of Canadian democracy.

I also want to note that, in the case of Quebec, it has been decided not to use the data in Quebec's permanent list of electors to establish the computerized federal register. Instead, a last door to door enumeration will take place next spring in Quebec and elsewhere, according to a decision resulting from unfortunate and costly choices made by the government in this bill.

[*English*]

In laying out the Reform position I would like to note that three major parts, three major changes or major initiatives are undertaken in this legislation. First is the establishment of a permanent register of electors. Second is the establishment of a 36-day calendar rather than the present 47-day calendar for the the holding of federal election campaigns. Both of these changes are to be implemented at the time of the next election by way of a pre-election enumeration. Finally, a clause in this bill staggers voting hours across the country.

All three of these changes have been supported in principle by the Reform Party, the Bloc Quebecois and other political parties. The problem is the method of implementation chosen which particularly in the case of the permanent voters' list and the 36-day campaign will prove to be premature and costly in the way they are being implemented. In the case of staggered voting hours, that is being done in a way that requires much broader consultation and consensus to be acceptable to western Canadians.

I should note, in making this observation, that broadly speaking we would support these initiatives if we could come to some kind of agreement. I note there are a number of issues not covered in this legislation.

The Reform Party has favoured for a number of years initiatives which would result in fixed election dates in the country within the context of a parliamentary system, allowing for the provision of a normal time period for the holding of an election which could be violated in exceptional circumstances but not normally. We have supported initiatives that would remove federal political parties from the various subsidies and tax concessions that they now receive. This would get federal political parties out of the tax trough.

• (1145)

These changes are not incorporated in the bill. Neither are similar concerns which have been raised by the Bloc Quebecois and go in a completely different direction. For years the Bloc Quebecois has favoured the public subsidization of political parties and would like to see various provisions of Quebec electoral law implemented at the federal level. These would control the spending and money raising of political parties. As well, the Bloc Quebecois favours restrictions on third party advertising, or the gag law, which the Reform Party opposes and which has been struck down in court.

As well, both the Reform Party and the Bloc Quebecois differ with the government on fundamental issues of representation. For example, the Bloc Quebecois favours a 25 per cent minimum provision of Commons seats for Quebec. In our case, we support Senate reform, a triple E Senate in particular, and regional representation.

None of those things are found in the bill. Obviously there is no consensus on them. I mention them because they are important items and we would like the government and the procedure and House affairs committee to study them. I also mention them to make it clear that, in spite of our very different approaches and opinions on these very contentious issues, they are not the reason we lack unanimous agreement for the bill.

It would be irresponsible for the Reform Party or the Bloc to hold up positive changes to federal election law because some other things are not in the bill. They did not have all party support. We certainly have not done that and we do not intend to do it.

That is not why we object to this legislation. We object to this legislation because of its substantive contents. In our view the principles in the bill are not being properly or well implemented. Just as important, the process followed in developing the bill has been terribly flawed.

The hon. member for Bellechasse laid out those concerns in great detail and at length, and I support almost all of what he said in that regard. My colleague from the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona, noted that while we did reach all party agreement on some amendments, it should be noted that these

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amendments were introduced not only after report stage, but after the application of time allocation on debate, both at report stage and at third reading.

This bill was presented only a month ago. This is the third day it has been debated in the House. Yet after the first day of full debate after its return from committee, the government implemented time allocation. In my view, the procedure of using time allocation for electoral law, doing it quickly and without the consent of the other political parties, is the kind of dangerous application of electoral practices that we are more likely to find in third world countries.

As I have repeatedly said throughout this discussion, that process was completely unnecessary. Every indication that we have had during the debate, in the committee hearings and in the House, has been that with further discussion we would reach an all party consensus on virtually all of the items in the legislation, yet we have ended up rushing the process. Some positive amendments have been made in the process, but they were made in a very scattered and irregular manner.

The hon. member for Bellechasse also mentioned the fact that before the bill was tabled we found out about it through the media. That was also an irregularity which, in our view, should not have occurred. I will have time to speak to that at greater length later in my speech.

The chief electoral officer consulted the committee on preliminary legislation in April of this year. The government waited from April until October before acting. When it finally acted it presented a bill that was different in some critical ways from the principles which had all party agreement in April. That was completely unnecessary and completely irregular.

• (1150)

I observed something different than the hon. member for Bellechasse. He observed that the government did not follow such a practice in the case of the previous electoral legislation, Bill C-69. I do not entirely agree with him on that count. The government has demonstrated a tendency to act unilaterally on election law before.

Let me disagree with him in this regard. It is true that in the case of Bill C-69, unlike this legislation, we did study that legislation for a substantial period of time. We looked at it intensively and we came to all party agreement on most of the particulars of the legislation.

However, the principal purpose and concern of that bill was the scrapping of the electoral boundaries process so that it would not be in place for the 1997 election. That was our very fundamental objection to that legislation. We would have been perfectly prepared to approve it if it would have gone through after the current redistribution had been completed. We all know that ultimately the

bill never passed and the redistribution has been completed. That was the reason we opposed the legislation. It was a part of the bill and virtually all of the opposition parties in both Houses of Parliament opposed it for that reason.

It is important that when the bill ultimately failed, the government never passed the things on which we all agreed. That says a lot. We developed a new process that would have been an improvement. Ninety-five per cent of the bill ultimately could have been passed in the House and in the Senate. Yet once the government failed to get the one thing it did not have all party agreement on it chose not to proceed with the bill at all. This says a lot about its practices on previous election legislation.

I have so far not said what the hon. member for Bellechasse has said. In spite of what has occurred in the past six months—especially this past month—we have worked well with individual members of the government. I acknowledge the work of the chief government whip, the member for Stormont—Dundas, and the hon. member for Fundy—Royal, the chairman of the committee, and other members of the government staff who have worked to try to facilitate discussion and agreement on individual items. We acknowledge the importance of this work.

Nevertheless we have been operating within a terribly constricted timetable, a process that has not allowed us to come to a consensus. It was unnecessary because all of this could have been done months ago.

What remains in this legislation after amendment are two basic substantive problems which I will address. The two major problems with this legislation as it is now being passed are, first, the specific proposal to stagger voting hours for the next federal election, and second, the proposal to implement the new register and shortened electoral period through a spring enumeration which will be very costly.

First, the staggered voting hours were not part of this bill when it went to committee before second reading. That is important to mention. Not only has this bill been rushed, but the provision which the Reform Party now objects to most strenuously was not even included in this bill when it was tabled.

That provision came from private member's Bill C-307, tabled by the hon. member for Vancouver East, which was passed by this House some days after Bill C-63 was sent to the procedure and House affairs committee.

• (1155)

Bill C-307, which dealt with staggered voting hours, was passed by the House by unanimous agreement only on the grounds that the issues in it would be studied and we would arrive at a consensus on the specific proposal to be implemented. It is important to note that

the proposal in Bill C-307 and the proposal in Bill C-63 are not the same proposal.

Two basic reasons were given for wanting to alter periods of voting across the country. First was the problem of western alienation. Westerners see the government being chosen before the polls have actually closed in their ridings. Second was the fact that western Canadians through modern communications techniques, particularly the Internet, may increasingly know about the results before they vote.

On the first question it is important to remind the House that the Reform Party rejects staggered voting hours as a serious solution to the problem of western alienation. It is true, Mr. Speaker, and you know this, that westerners say that the government is elected before our votes are even counted.

However, only an extremely naive person or an easterner would say that changing the order of counting the votes is a solution to this problem. Westerners are smart enough to realize that even if we counted the votes in the completely opposite order, governments could still be chosen without any support whatsoever from western Canada.

That is very fundamental. It will probably happen again in the next election. It will happen not because of the order the votes are counted, it will happen because of the functioning of the parliamentary system. Until the government is prepared to study that issue seriously, we will not arrive at a solution to western alienation or the alienation that exists in other parts of the country.

This is not a solution to that problem. Reform has never suggested it is so we reject it out of hand. However, Reform did accept looking at the problem that people may increasingly know the results in other parts of the country before they vote. This may be dangerous in some way to democracy and alter behaviour or affect the results.

The Reform Party said it was willing to study that issue. It is important to realize, and anybody who looks at the transcripts of the committee will see that no convincing evidence was provided to the committee that this is creating a serious problem in the functioning of our democracy.

Specifically, I asked the various witnesses whether there was any documented evidence or any serious academic study on whether knowing the results in other parts of the country had either of two effects: caused people not to vote or it caused them to vote differently than they would vote otherwise. There is precious little evidence that either of these things are true.

The only evidence that was presented in committee was a remark by the chief electoral officer that some studies in the United States indicate that western Americans, knowing the results already from

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the east, might not turn out at the voting stations in the western United States, which may diminish voting by about 3 per cent.

Three per cent is not large but it is important to realize that the United States has no legal blackout. Information on electoral results flows freely across the country. That environment is very different from ours where we still have a blackout on mainstream media and have very effective control over the flow of information. I believe the impact would be even less. In the United States, without those things, the impact is only 3 per cent. Here it must be substantially less.

• (1200)

As I say, there is no indication today that this is causing a serious problem in terms of how people vote or whether they vote but it could in the future. This tells us that we should be very cautious before playing around with the rules of the game to fix this problem.

The discussion in committee focused on four different elements of a solution. Only one of them was on staggering hours. Another was delaying the vote count in areas of eastern Canada. Another was eliminating the blackout provision in the Atlantic provinces because obviously Atlantic Canada cannot elect the national government, and possibly allowing the count to proceed in eastern Canada at least a half hour before the close of the polls in the west because of the delay in results coming out even once the counting started. Those were the four elements that the committee studied as a way of finding solutions to the problem.

It is important to note that I felt, and possibly other members of the committee would agree, the committee discussion indicated that some combination of these solutions would be the way to proceed. In fact on three of those items, staggering the hours, delaying the count and eliminating the Atlantic Canada blackout, there seemed to be a fair degree of consensus that these were possibilities. On the fourth issue, allowing the count to actually proceed a half hour earlier in Ontario and Quebec, it should be noted that the member for Vancouver East herself, the sponsor of the bill, rejected that as a possible solution.

The solution proposed by the government without the support of the opposition parties is of a completely different nature than the solution which was discussed during the hearings. The government refused to put in delays to the count, did not eliminate the blackout and in fact did provide for the count to begin a half hour earlier in central Canada.

As well the government provided two other elements that had not previously been raised in our discussions. One was the closure of the polls at 7.30 in the province of Alberta, which is now in this bill. The element that we had the most concern about, the early closure of the polls in British Columbia, is now augmented by the

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early closure of the polls in Alberta as well, an option which was never discussed in committee.

Also, it is an anomaly that the closure of the polls and the counting under the government proposal will now proceed even earlier in Atlantic Canada than it would have before. The polls will now close up to two and a half hours earlier in Newfoundland than they will in Quebec and Ontario. This was not part of any solution the committee looked at.

Let me put all of this detail in perspective. The bottom line is that the solution to this problem will be based entirely on staggering the hours. The staggering of the hours will occur in such a way that the polls will close at seven o'clock in British Columbia and at 7.30 in Alberta.

According to the government, the solution to the problem of westerners being alienated and also the vote of westerners somehow being affected or devalued because results are being counted already in the east is to cut out prime voting hours in British Columbia and Alberta. In other words, the west will pay for the solution to the problems of the electoral system. This is not a solution for western Canadians; this is trying to solve the west as a problem rather than the problem itself.

This should not proceed without all-party agreement, not just because we lack consensus but because the vast majority of the members of this House representing British Columbia and Alberta will be the very people opposing this legislation. That should raise suspicions in everyone's mind.

People will be very upset when they realize the implications of this. I will say to them, a little bit tongue and cheek, to make sure the government pays for this decision at the polls, if they can get there, and that is an important if.

• (1205)

Let me move on to our second major concern with this bill. The implementation of the permanent register and the shorter electoral period is to occur through a pre-election enumeration to be held in the spring.

In April when the chief electoral officer came to the committee, he outlined two different scenarios under which we could achieve a 36 day period and a permanent register. One was to simply proceed with the next election in the way we have always proceeded: use the 47 day calendar, have the enumeration and then have the enumeration serve as the basis for the permanent register. That would obviously be the simplest solution in technical terms. Another was to have a pre-election enumeration. However, he said at the time that a pre-election enumeration would require a lead time of one year. He said that in order to implement it for a fall

1997 election, the legislative changes had to be in place by the summer of 1996.

That is easy to work out. We are obviously now implementing these changes six months later than was proposed, to be implemented four months earlier than was proposed. How is it that we can we proceed in that manner? We can proceed by dramatically increasing the costs of the process. In our view, this defeats the entire purpose of the legislation. The entire purpose has been to reduce electoral costs.

The assumption has been that a permanent electoral list and the revision of the list through access to various data sources at the federal and provincial levels will prove to be less costly in the long run than a door to door enumeration. This is not only because a permanent register is less costly, not only because we do not have to create a list every single time, but also because the list can be shared by all levels of government: federal, provincial, regional, municipal, and school boards.

However, what we have done here is to ensure that we create the list in a way that is unnecessarily expensive. Let me be very specific about that. Not only are we doing it outside the electoral period which makes it more expensive, but because we are doing it on an accelerated timetable, we minimize our ability to use lists that have already been created in other parts of the country.

In committee we did make a positive change. We got a change through that would require the chief electoral officer to use lists where an enumeration has been conducted within the past year. That would mean that in the case of Alberta which has 26 federal ridings and Prince Edward Island which has four federal ridings we will not need to do an enumeration.

The chief electoral officer feels that those lists can still be implemented in time for the spring and it will save us money. That is 30 ridings out of 301, or only about 10 per cent. Our hope had been that by further delaying the implementation, we would be able to capture enumerations and permanent voters lists created in other parts of the country.

British Columbia has a permanent voters register and we are told that Quebec's register will be ready by May 1. These are the second and third largest provinces in the country. Were we to capture these two provinces in our efforts, as well as a few others such as the Yukon, we would have been able to forgo a door to door enumeration in one-half of the country. It is important to note that this is the major additional cost we are applying to the next election.

The chief electoral officer believes that by proceeding in this manner we will be able to save \$30 million in future elections, not in the one coming up, but in future elections. It is important to note that those savings are as yet unrealized. They are in the future and there could be complications. Frankly I would take those as

maximum figures. Let us assume we have a maximum savings of \$30 million. We have already seen in British Columbia that its permanent list has proven to be somewhat more expensive than was thought.

• (1210)

What is certain is that because of the process followed by this government, the next election will cost \$41 million more. That cost will occur primarily because we are doing a door to door enumeration virtually across the country, except for Alberta and Prince Edward Island, outside of the campaign period. That is a cost of nearly \$80 million.

Making every effort to ensure that we could get Quebec, British Columbia and others into this process before the next federal election or before a door to door enumeration is critical to being able to realize real cost savings immediately. However the government has chosen not to do that.

We tabled an amendment yesterday that would have put back the clock not 12 months as the government had originally indicated, but only four months. We put in an amendment to move the clock back just four months and the government rejected it. The government has tabled a positive amendment that will give us some certainty as to when this can be implemented and that in effect is not until the end of April.

By rejecting an amendment to implement this in the fall and by insisting through time allocation and a rush study of this bill that this be implemented by May 1, we have the unprecedented case of a government showing its electoral timetable to the public. For that I am grateful. It will make it much easier for our party to plan the next election. It is very clear to everybody now that the government has created a situation where, barring some kind of PR catastrophe, it will call an election in early May and will have it in mid-June. That is getting to be a fairly obvious option given what the government has done with this bill.

As I say, the government could have delayed it. In the process of delaying it, the government could have made the entire process less expensive. It is important to add that the government could have shortened the electoral period anyway for the next election even without proceeding in this manner.

The Lortie commission said on page 123 of volume two its report, and this is important: "Shorter federal election campaigns do not necessarily depend on introducing a register of voters. A shorter election campaign is feasible even if the current enumeration process is retained. That said, it is improbable that the campaign could be shortened much beyond 40 days". According to the Lortie commission, we could have shortened the electoral period for the next campaign from 47 to 40 days without doing a pre-election enumeration and without imposing the additional costs on taxpayers that are going to be imposed.

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The government is proceeding with this for reasons that are obvious only to itself and which are expensive to the taxpayers and ultimately it perceives as in its own interest. Otherwise the government would have reached an agreement with the opposition parties on how to proceed. That said, I will add that in this specific instance exactly how it is implementing this, the government did make some concessions to the opposition parties that are worth noting.

First, the government did provide through amendment at committee a specific timetable as to when the bill can be implemented. It did say that the enumeration process and most of the sections of the bill would become effective April 1 for a 30 day enumeration campaign, making an election call possible under the new calendar effectively at the end of April. The government did do that. It put time lines on various sections of the bill.

The government and all parties also agreed to a motion this morning. It additionally would provide the opposition parties with a one-time provision of the electoral list as soon as that enumeration is completed and it is feasible to transmit the results of the permanent register to the party.

Those two changes do provide some degree of certainty. We said that this is an important issue, that we already know we are going to be surprised with the date so do not surprise us as well with how the timetable is going to be implemented. The government did do that. That does not change our fundamental objection that this should be done in a way that minimizes costs and sticks to a timetable closer to the original consultations it had with the opposition parties in April. However, as I say, it chose for its own reasons to proceed in a different manner.

• (1215)

Those are our two major objections. There were a number of other areas to which we objected in this legislation. However, in the course of studying the bill, both in committee and in the House, some improvements have been made. Let me complete my remarks by going through some of the other provisions of the legislation which are deficient or which have been improved. As I say, these provisions are less important but not by any means unimportant items.

With respect to byelections, one of the specific concerns which the Reform Party has had with this bill has been the provision to call snap byelections. I have said this repeatedly, but already in this Parliament the government has appointed people to patronage positions or to the Senate in order to open up a safe riding for a snap byelection. In the dead of winter, just after Christmas of last year, that occurred. Our concern was that by shortening the electoral period from 47 days to 36 days this process would be further abused.

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We called for the creation of a 30 day cooling off period. In other words, the government could not call a byelection for at least 30 days after a vacancy in the House of Commons occurred. The government has provided today, through an amendment, an 11 day cooling off period, which at least provides us with the status quo. It provides us with, in effect, a minimum 47 day election campaign because there will have to be 11 days before the election is called and then 36 days for the campaign itself. That is an important amendment which was brought in by the government this morning. Perhaps it is not as long a period as we wanted, but we are grateful that we could come to an all party agreement on it.

However, it did not address a second concern which we raised, which could have been addressed at the same time, the problem of byelections simply not being held at all. Under the Parliament of Canada Act the government must call an election with 180 days of the occurrence of a vacancy. It is important to note that the election does not have to be held in any particular time period. It has been common in recent years for governments to put off late term byelections. We know that when we get near the end of a term seats open up for all kinds of reasons, retiring MPs are appointed or seek other work or whatever. We know that seats become vacant. What has happened in the recent past is that governments have decided to leave the seats vacant almost indefinitely, putting the date of a byelection well past the next general election. That could have been addressed in this legislation, but the government chose not to.

I only have a short time left, so I am going to go quickly through some of the other things I wanted to draw to the attention of the House.

The government did remove the automatic publication of gender on voters lists. That is something which we had asked for. That was done today. The government has added the date of birth as a mandatory requirement, collected for the register, as the Bloc Quebecois demanded. That was an item which we also supported. However, the government did not agree to delete the automatic provision of the electoral list to political parties annually, as provided for in this act. That is important. We objected to that and we believe the government should have removed the provision.

I would point out what the privacy commissioner said. We agree with him wholeheartedly: "Annual disclosures of the list appears excessive in light of the list's express purpose of conducting elections or referenda. Given that no jurisdiction conducts annual elections, this frequent a disclosure seems more suited to repeated canvassing by political parties, not to the election itself". As I say, that is a deficiency of the legislation which we had hoped to correct.

• (1220)

There are other points I could go on about, a number of more minor matters where there has been some improvement; for

example, the elimination of revising officers, the decision to shorten time off work that employers must provide from four hours to three hours. There has been a number of other improvements we can point to but in the big picture this legislation remains flawed.

It is flawed because we have followed a process that was rushed, undemocratic and unnecessary. With further discussion we would have reached a bill that not only was agreed to by all parties but that was much better for the people of Canada.

Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast): Are there no questions and comments?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Is this a point of order?

Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast): Yes, Madam Speaker. Are there no questions and comments?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): Not for the first three speakers on this motion. We are now going into debate, to be followed from now on with questions.

Mrs. Anna Terrana (Vancouver East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act. I will share my time with my colleague for Vancouver Quadra.

I am glad to see that several amendments are being considered to make elections less expensive and fairer to all. Elections can be very tiring and any improvement is welcome.

However, although a permanent voters list can be more practical and a less expensive way of having voters on file, I am concerned about the difficulty in keeping it up to date. In some areas of Vancouver East people are very transient and that may cause a problem.

[*Translation*]

Still, the permanent list is certainly more practical and it eliminates the need to hold enumerations for each election, while allowing for a reduction of the electoral period from the current 47 days to a minimum of 36 days. Besides saving \$30 million, the government will also give candidates less time to campaign. I think this change will be appreciated both by the candidate and the voter. These advantages are by far superior to the disadvantages and, as we know, nothing is perfect.

However, the part of the bill that is the most interesting to me is clause 44.1 dealing with the closing of polling stations.

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[English]

I presented a private member's bill in June, Bill C-307. It asked for the closing of all polling stations at the same time. I would like to thank the government and all my colleagues for supporting the concept in principle and making it more workable across the country. It is true that in this big country of ours there is little flexibility due to the many time zones we have to live with. We cannot disrupt the lives of people in one part of the country to make it easier in another part of the country. The only other possibility would be to make all of Canada one time zone, but I do not believe this would receive much support.

These changes are extremely important for B.C. As I have indicated in my debate, in spite of comments made by some colleagues of mine to the effect that it is just a question of perception, this is not a question of perception. It is a question of reality and of feeling unimportant in one of the most important democratic exercises of any country, the election of a new government.

We know that numbers are in the east for the time being and that the decision will still be made in the east of the country, but at least we in the west will not know of such a result before we finish voting so the next election will be able to count.

Let me assure all my colleagues who talk about perception that in B.C. I receive many positive comments with regard to these changes. There is also a lot of support on the part of the media.

As indicated in committee, I do support the need not to change voting hours too drastically in the Atlantic provinces. I believe it is acceptable because the seats in that area number 32 as opposed to 34 in B.C., which will not completely disrupt the final results.

What is crucial is not to know the results in Ontario and Quebec before we close the polls in British Columbia. The difference in closing times of half an hour became an acceptable compromise. In fact, it will at least take half an hour to start counting the ballots and at that time polls in B.C. will be closed.

• (1225)

We noticed the same problem during the recent U.S. elections. One of my colleagues has said that there is a blackout in Canada but there is no blackout in the United States. I do not know how we can believe in blackouts nowadays with the technology we have in place.

As for the hours of voting time B.C. will lose in the evening, it is amply made up by two additional hours in the morning, which will give many a chance to vote before going to work.

I would like to conclude by thanking all of those who understood the need to change the closing time of polling stations and for accepting my further request to extend the hours to 12 from 11,

because this will make the situation more equal for all Canadians and will help promote unity in the country.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I wish to address an issue in my hon colleague's comments which is very credible. She said that one of the most important democratic exercises of our country is our elections. My comment rises out of a concern of a constituent, Reverend Rude, who was serving outside Canada with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in El Salvador. We are looking here at expanding the democratic rights of all Canadians in terms of their eligibility to vote.

In section 51 of schedule II, section 1(c), if we could amend that aspect of the bill to include missionaries as a designation, it would give them the opportunity to vote. Right now they are not permitted to vote if they live outside Canada for more than five years. I am not sure if the hon. member has a comment she might wish to make on that oversight on the part of the government. It really does disenfranchise thousands of missionaries who serve Canadians and others abroad so well.

I would like the hon. member to comment on that and whether she would be willing to promote and amend section (c) to also include missionaries overseas.

Mrs. Terrana: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague.

This is definitely not included in the bill. I would like to see it included. I have also tabled another amendment to the electoral act having to do with people in hospitals. That is another issue that is not included in the bill. I do not know how much time we have to change these things. I do not think it is possible right now but we surely should work on it.

My private member's Bill C-308 pertains to making sure that people in hospitals get to vote. At that time we can probably address missionaries.

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in support of this bill, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act. I hope I will be allowed to put into perspective the addresses from two colleagues from the other side whom I respect very much for their work on constitutional matters, the hon. member for Bellechasse and the hon. member for Calgary West.

I am a little surprised to hear suggestions that this bill has been rushed through or that not adequate time has been allowed for consideration.

I am reminded of the experience of Lord Eldon who was lord chancellor for 21 years, broken by several periods only when his party was in opposition. He began sitting on a case at the beginning of his tenure and it was still there 21 years later.

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I sat on the committee on procedure and House affairs and I remember considering this bill. Then I was moved on to another office and I ceased to be a member of that committee. I returned as a guest two weeks ago when the bill of the hon. member for Vancouver East was being considered.

• (1230)

What we see here is not undue and indecent haste but what Mr. Justice Frankfurter of the United States Supreme Court has called moving with all deliberate speed. This is a relatively modest measure which covers the two issues.

On the establishment of a permanent register, I would have thought there was no room for doubt or argument. Anybody who has experienced permanent registers in other democratic countries comparable to our own will know that it operates easily and effectively. Changes can be made easily enough. It is a much better system than the ad hoc arrangement we go through every time we have an election.

The second issue covered is the shortening of the election campaign period. The minimum period which has been shortened from 47 days to 36 days is surely a self-evident proposition. I say this simply because we do not have, in contrast to other constitutions, much in the way of a statement in our Constitution of the necessary and vital elements in the constitutional processes, that is, on the system of elections and the system of political parties.

As a result of the civil war amendments, the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments were adopted into the United States constitution. This has given rise not only to federal legislation in the implementation of those constitutional amendments, but also to a massive system of court based jurisprudence, a development on a step by step basis of principles of law fleshing out the large motor principles of the constitution.

It is a fact that the paradigm of modern constitutions, Germany, has been borrowed by the new Russian constitution, the new Republic of South Africa constitution and indeed has been borrowed around the world. The original West German constitution of 1949 has detailed provisions on the constitutional processes, electoral processes, parties and again a very substantial system of court jurisprudence.

By way of comparison, our Constitution only has the section on democratic rights in section three of the charter of rights. I suppose we could also include the preamble to the original Constitution Act, 1867, a designation too particularistic today, a constitution similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom but which was used by the Supreme Court of Canada in one of its most imaginative judgments, the Alberta press case, to develop a constitutional

system of civil liberties before we had a charter of rights or even the statutory bill of rights which was Mr. Diefenbaker's later bill.

I am suggesting that this is a measure which perhaps has taken more time than it has needed, I would have said an undue amount of time for the matters covered. However it is an important first step and we welcome it on that basis. It is inevitable that the courts will build on this. They have already begun to do so on a somewhat piecemeal basis in two decisions, one in which I participated as an expert adviser to the court and another more recent case before the Supreme Court of Alberta, which have entered into general jurisprudence in so far as neither the first one nor the second one were appealed by the Attorney General of Canada.

I anticipate that we will develop as vital to the political processes what U.S. Chief Justice Stone called the constituent processes, the starting point of any constitutional system of government. We will develop more legislation in this field. We will have more work before more committees. As Jeremy Bentham has reminded us, we will develop to a very considerable extent the concept of judge and company, of legislators and courts working together to develop in the interstices of specific cases and with regard to specific problems as they arise, new and growing principles of constitutional law on elections.

• (1235)

It is on that basis we should approach the deliberation of this particular amendment. I welcome in that sense the constructive contribution made by my colleague the member for Vancouver East, who against all odds moved to redress what is a matter of considerable grievance to citizens in western Canada and one knows also to those in the western United States.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, who said he did not think this bill was being rushed through. I for one think it is. I think we do not have enough time to consider it fully. We are under great pressure to pass this bill forthwith or almost. That is undemocratic, especially when the opposition cannot express its views on legislation as important as this one.

I travelled in Latin America and I regularly meet people from foreign countries. They are very interested in the Canadian electoral system. They want their countries to have more democratic, more transparent election legislation.

While Canada has a democratic system, we could go one step further by having in our legislation provisions similar to those found in Quebec's legislation for example. In Quebec, only individual voters are allowed to finance electoral campaigns, not corporations and big companies as is currently the case in Canada.

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There is another problem I would like to put to the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra. Returning officers are appointed by the government. These people play a key role in an election. In Quebec, they are appointed by the Quebec director general of elections. Why not have a similar provision saying that, in Canada, returning officers shall be appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada in an objective and impartial fashion, on the basis of a competition, instead of on a patronage basis as is currently the case?

In almost every riding in Quebec, friends of the old Conservative regime were replaced with Liberals or friends of the Liberal Party. That is undemocratic, and something should be done about it. Returning officers should be appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the basis of an open competition. That is my question to the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Mr. McWhinney: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Bourassa for his comments, which were, as usual, well-documented. This man truly understands the constitutional process. I respect his knowledge.

When I expressed surprise that this bill had been rushed through, I was referring to the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Lengthy, in-depth studies were done in this committee, of which I was a member for two years. For these reasons, I will limit my comments to the committee.

Concerning the appointment of officials to supervise the voting, some changes could surely be made. As I made recommendations myself, I will point out that I was asked for very specific information about experience, expertise, technical training, etc. I am satisfied with the process as it stands, but I will take the hon. member's proposals under consideration.

• (1240)

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Madam Speaker, I also wish to address Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

Like the hon. member for Bellechasse, I too am surprised by the government's haste in pushing through this reform, and also by the fact that it overlooked many aspects which should have been reviewed to improve the democratic process, as the hon. member for Bourassa pointed out earlier. The government should also have made sure that, short of obtaining the unanimous consent of the House, it at least allowed members to take part in a full debate on the issue. Instead, we had barely started discussing the reform when the government decided to invoke time allocation. Such an attitude is indicative of the government's utter lack of respect, something that is the Liberal Party's trademark. Historically, if there is any group that has shown no respect for the House throughout Canada, it is this party.

In the last one hundred years or so, the Liberals have, thanks to all sorts of schemes, managed to be in office for close to 75 years. This is to say they will do anything, showing no respect for the House, to hang on to power.

As the hon. member for Bellechasse mentioned this morning, they had no respect for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee, which is generally free of any partisan attitudes, which reaches a consensus 99 per cent of the time, and which could have played a central role in this review designed to improve the elections act was utterly ignored, along with its Liberal, Reform and Bloc members. Yet the committee had reached consensus on several issues in anticipation of a possible reform. But no, the Liberals, as always, had no respect for the committee and utterly ignored it.

They show no respect either for their own platform, as there was a clear commitment in the red book for an in depth reform of the Elections Act with a view, for example, to restricting big corporations' influence, as was mentioned by my colleague from Bourassa.

They had told us that we would think it over together, that members would have their say about it. Why did we not have a special debate on this, as we had one a year ago on the issue of our armed forces' role in peacekeeping missions? Democracy itself is at stake here, but we did not even have a special debate on this, to hear the views of all the members. No, they utterly ignored the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

They disregarded their own platform. This has always been typical of the Liberal Party: say one thing during the campaign, and another once in power. They have always broken their commitments; that does not surprise me.

But they did not show any respect here for their own statements in the House, especially their famous statement on distinct society. They said, with every intention of following through, that they would have a resolution passed recognizing distinct society without, however, entrenching it in the Constitution. One year later—I think it was passed on November 29 of last year—if that resolution had any meaning for the Liberals, they would have taken time to reflect on this reform of the Elections Act and find out that in Quebec our legal institutions operate under French law whereas in the rest of Canada they operate under common law.

Now, the way "domicile" and "residence" are defined is completely different. They could have included both definitions. That is what we suggested, but it was rejected, because the statement on distinct society was only smoke and mirrors. So they have no respect for their own resolution.

It has no respect for the other parties' arguments. I am not necessarily thinking here of arguments of the Bloc, but of those of the Reform Party concerning byelections. That party suggested that, instead of the 36 days provided for general elections, we should keep the 47 day period for byelections to prevent the

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occasional dirty trick, like the one pulled by the Deputy Prime Minister. With a short period of 36 days, opposition parties are at a clear disadvantage. This also shows no respect for the opposition parties.

• (1245)

The Liberal Party also has no respect for Quebec, for the way things are done in Quebec, since this province already has a permanent list. Quebec offered to let the federal government use its list, on a shared cost basis. The chief electoral officer in Quebec figures this could save between \$15 and \$20 million. But no, this is coming from Quebec, and the Liberal Party of Canada will have none of it. The Liberals want to have their own enumeration. They will duplicate the process Quebec has just been through, because it is going to have its permanent list by May 1. Quebec has suggested both levels of government use the same list, share the costs, and thus make huge savings of some \$15 to \$20 million. This offer was rejected.

The Liberal Party has no respect for everything that is being done in the provinces, especially in Quebec. Nor does it have any respect for the democratic electoral process, as evidenced by the patronage appointments of Liberal hacks. Ninety-five per cent of new returning officers are Liberal organizers who have been asked to prepare the federal elections based on the needs of the Liberal Party. That is the way the party has always done things.

So, it has absolutely no respect for its own platform, no respect for parliamentary tradition, no respect for the provinces, no respect when it comes to appointing returning officers, no respect for the proposals brought forward by other parties and no respect for its own statements.

At this point I would ask the unanimous consent of the House to keep talking indefinitely. Do I have unanimous consent, Madam Speaker?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Plamondon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): The hon. member has asked for the unanimous consent of the House to keep talking indefinitely. Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais): I am sorry, but the hon. member does not have unanimous consent.

Mr. Plamondon: Madam Speaker, you should have asked the clerks. I think you reiterated the question to allow the government

party to voice its opposition. I am surprised to see how this assembly is suddenly interested in my speech.

What is most surprising in this reform is to see—

Mr. Kilger: Yes.

Mr. Plamondon: I want to greet the chief whip who is coming into the House. I think he was quite right to get out his whip. His troops had deserted him, I believe. As he could not find them, he is here alone. But I can understand them.

I can understand their wanting to hide and to refrain from speaking on such a meaningless bill, a bill which does not in any way conform to their own platform or serve democracy in Canada and Quebec.

No doubt what annoys my Liberal colleagues the most is to see that there is nothing in this bill to reform of political party financing so as to achieve a greater transparency and improve democracy.

Speaking of political party financing, in the last election, all political parties promised to review this issue because it was determined that there is still too much hidden influence on the government's legislative agenda because of party financing. All parties agreed on that. The Liberal Party said so during the election but, typically, its members now say otherwise. That is just like the Liberal Party.

Just one party not only said that it would talk about party financing after the election but actually acted accordingly before the election by financing its activities in a manner different from what the other parties in this House did, refusing all contributions from people who do not have the right to vote, as has been the case in Quebec since 1977.

What can we say about the financing of political parties in this House? Well, there has been an improvement in the last 15 years. Previously, 80 per cent of corporations and big unions controlled political parties through party financing.

• (1250)

Thanks to the tax credit introduced about fifteen years ago, we have seen a constant increase in the public's involvement in party financing. In fact, we can now say that only 40 per cent of the major parties' revenues come from corporations. However, even with only 40 per cent, there is always a possibility of conflict of interest because any corporation donating \$50,000 to a political party will probably engage in lobbying during the following parliamentary session.

Let us look only at the charges made against senators and members of the House of Commons in the last 10 years, particularly the behaviour of certain ministers in this House since the 1993 election. For example, less than two months after being elected, the Minister of Canadian Heritage invited 20 people to a \$2,000

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private cocktail, for a total of \$40,000. A few months later, she awarded discretionary contracts out of the budget of the Canadian heritage department, using our tax money, to these people who had contributed \$2,000 to her election campaign. Now this was a matter serious enough to ask for her immediate resignation. What did the Prime Minister do? He applauded the Minister, unlike the previous Prime Minister who, at least, had the decency to ask for their resignation in such cases.

Then, the former Minister of National Defence awarded a \$75,000 phoney discretionary research contract to the treasurer of his riding's Liberal organization. Why did this minister award such a contract if not to recover some of that money for his own election? One has to wonder.

Let us talk about other ministers, including the Prime Minister, who travels all over Canada, and about receptions at \$350 or \$500 a plate—

Mr. Rocheleau: They can cost \$1,200 a plate.

Mr. Plamondon: My colleague, the member for Trois-Rivières, who knows all about political party financing and who gets his financing through the sale of membership cards and small donations from people in his riding to maintain his freedom of action—democratic behaviour that does him credit—says that these receptions can cost as much as \$1,200 a plate.

Do you not think that the 600 or 700 guests who paid \$1,200 a plate to hear the Prime Minister and the corporations that bought 10, 15, 20, 30 or 100 tickets could greatly influence the government agenda afterwards? We understand why they do not want to give family trusts a closer look.

Let us recall what openness is all about. I would like to quote from statements I made on the subject when I moved a motion in favour of public funding for all political parties.

At that time, I said that, under section 121 of the Criminal Code, donations aimed at obtaining special privileges are illegal in Canada. In fact, that section is directed at those who give money to political parties with the specific aim of getting government contracts. Subsection 121(2) reads:

(2) Every one commits an offence who, in order to obtain or retain a contract with the government, or as a term of any such contract, whether express or implied, directly or indirectly subscribes or gives, or agrees to subscribe or give, to any person any valuable consideration: (a) for the purpose of promoting the election of a candidate or a class or party of candidates to Parliament or the legislature of a province; or (b) with intent to influence or affect in any way the result of an election conducted for the purpose of electing persons to serve in Parliament or the legislature of a province.

It is clear that, as far as openness is concerned, the Criminal Code is very demanding of members of Parliament. But, from all appearances, the Liberal government is not ready to abide by the spirit of the Criminal Code.

Canadians and Quebecers demand total openness from their elected representatives. Greed is probably very human, but it is incompatible with the political ideal of common good. In this regard, the role of government is to discourage any political practice allowing public office holders to use their positions for personal gain.

● (1255)

That is something the government should reflect on and include in this electoral reform.

Whether in cases of lobbying, patronage or conflict of interest, we have often been informed by the media that people had sought to influence those in charge of the public purse to gain a personal advantage for themselves or for the people they represent. Money is generally the main factor in these situations. As long as a large percentage of political party funding will come from corporate or union sources, ordinary Canadians will have every reason to wonder who we serve.

Can the worker from my riding who barely earns \$15,000 a year seriously believe that an engineering firm, a large bank or a businessman will donate \$50,000 to a political party without hoping to get a return on their investment? Can he seriously think that he will carry as much weight as this engineering firm in the decision making process? One simply has to ask the question to know the answer.

Corporate entities are always created for a specific purpose: for-profit organizations are there to make profits; non-profit organizations have very specific objectives; and unions are there to promote the interests of their members in the workplace.

When these organizations fund a political party, they stray considerably from the purposes for which they were originally created under federal or provincial laws. Those who refuse to see that these donations are not completely unselfish are really hiding their heads in the sand.

And how about the big fundraisers? Smoke and mirrors is often the answer. Good contacts in the business community eventually provide access to the holy of holies or may open the door to financial benefit.

Public funding of political parties would send a clear message of transparency and would show unequivocally that companies, unions and major financial backers no longer have an excessive amount of influence on the decision making process. This notion of transparency should have been included in this electoral reform.

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Democratically speaking, as well, if there were public funding, if only those entitled to vote were allowed to contribute to a political party, thus eliminating any corporations, unions or non-profit organizations, we would take a large step towards better democracy. Not only is public funding an initiative linked to transparency, but it is also a message of democracy from the voters.

Companies, associations and unions do not vote. There is therefore no reason why these organizations should play a preponderant role in our electoral and political system by funding more than 25 per cent of the activities of Canadian political parties. In certain parties, it is over 40 per cent.

Public funding is also a question of democracy. Voters are the ones who should control our electoral system, who are the very foundation of our democracy. This control must be exercised at all stages of the democratic process, requiring real participation by the public, but also requiring a decentralization of structures and decision making within political parties.

Obviously it is easier for party fundraisers to obtain one \$5,000 contribution than many \$50 contributions, but the fact that it is easier, not to say lazier, results in very centralized parties, where ordinary members feel out of place. By giving in to laziness, political parties are agreeing to serve corporate contributors, thus abandoning thousands of Canadians and Quebecers who have contributed, who have wanted to join their party, but who no longer have any influence.

Large donations make things simpler, but certainly less democratic. When, year after year, a political party makes a point of seeking contributions from voters, it shows that it needs them and commits itself to getting to know them and to consulting them on its major policies. The party membership is therefore given a much more important role and does not just work on winning an election every four years, with the result that democracy is exercised on an ongoing basis within each of the parties.

• (1300)

Through public funding, a contributor acquires an increased sense of belonging to his party, that can only increase with the democratic vigour of a society. The great virtue of public funding is that it forces political parties to increase decentralization of their structure, to return to their roots and to promote genuine interaction between the leaders and the membership. It is for these reasons that public funding should have been included in this electoral reform.

[English]

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

The hon. member made a comment with regard to who should be able to make a contribution and who should not. He indicated that those who vote could make a contribution and those who do not vote should not be able under the legislation to make a contribution to a political party or a candidate in a respective election.

I would like the hon. member to clarify that point. I do not think he was saying to us, although it sounded that way, that a person would have to vote in order to qualify to make a contribution. I do not think that was the intent of the hon. member. If it was, I would feel rather disappointed because it would take away a certain freedom from individuals. If one wishes to vote, okay. If not, no.

If there were a distinction between corporate entities and individuals, that would be something different.

[Translation]

Mr. Plamondon: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for giving me the opportunity to clarify. It seemed obvious to me. Everyone is entitled to vote, and there is no question of paying for the right to vote; I never said such a thing.

In order to have a more viable democracy, I said that the political parties should be funded only by those who are entitled to vote. I never referred to paying for the right to vote.

I said that companies ought not to have the right to contribute to a political party, nor corporations, nor unions, nor not for profit organizations, only individuals who are entitled to vote, in other words I am eliminating corporate entities. In Quebec, companies, unions and not for profit organizations have not been allowed to contribute to a political party since 1977, only individuals who are entitled to vote. The ordinary citizen can contribute. This greatly improves democracy, while at the same time greatly reducing the influence of corporations, who have been heavy contributors to a political party, over that party once it is elected.

The provincial Liberals and the Parti Québécois get their funding in this way, and the Bloc Québécois sitting here in this House was also funded in this way in the last election, in 1993. It refused all contributions from companies, labour unions or not for profit organizations, accepting them only from individuals entitled to vote. This is how it is funded every year.

Our fundraising campaign this year met its \$1 million objective in six months; last year, during the referendum, the objective was \$1.8 million. The list of contributors is made known, and only individuals with the right to vote are allowed to contribute to the party.

This is the reform we are suggesting, and we think that the government ought to have included it in its bill. This would have made a major contribution to cleaning up politics. The government would not then have had the problem of ministers in conflict of

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interest, as we have just experienced with three different ministers here, and with a number of ministers during the Conservative days.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I would like to pose a question to the member because of his longstanding experience as a politician. I want to make it perfectly clear that this is not a trick question. I want some input from a person who has been involved in the political process for a long time.

One concern I have as a member from British Columbia is what the Liberals have done in terms of responding to a perception, thereby creating more of a problem than there was in the first place. In fact, there was no problem. That is with respect to the fact that in Alberta, in the mountain time zone at least, the polls will be closing at 7.30 p.m., and in the Pacific time zone they will be closing at 7 p.m.

• (1305)

The major concern I have is the government responded to the member for Vancouver East and some of the things that have been popular in the press about the fact that people in western Canada are concerned that the vote is all over before they even start to count their ballots, which of course is nothing but a problem of perception. In trying to resolve this problem of perception, they are now going to be closing the polls in a metropolitan Vancouver, where many people are travelling for an hour or an hour and a half from work, arriving home at 6 p.m. or 7 p.m. before getting out to vote.

This member has been a politician for an extended period of time. Would he agree with me that what is going to happen, particularly in Vancouver, is people who are working for candidates and who have the ability to telephone people to try to get them out, this is going to be a severe detriment and problem for many of the people involved in the political process? It is going to be a different situation in politics in Vancouver than it will be in Toronto or Montreal because of that time change. It is a very unfair change. I wonder if the member would care to comment on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Plamondon: Madam Speaker, I want to say to the hon. member that I fully share his concerns. I believe that the first aim of any electoral reform should be to make voting more accessible. If we shorten the opening hours of polling stations in Vancouver or in British Columbia, democracy will suffer.

Workers who work fixed hours and who have to check in and out will not have enough time to vote while others who can more easily leave work will be able to vote. There is an injustice in terms of

accessibility. I believe, like you, that voting accessibility is more important than knowing election results in another province.

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to start by congratulating the hon. member for Richelieu on his excellent speech, especially the part on political party funding and his criticism of contributions made by large corporations to the traditional parties, including the Liberal Party.

I have a few figures, some examples of the incredible amounts contributed to the Liberal Party of Canada during the 1993 election campaign by companies such as Canadian Airlines, \$9,000; Canadian Pacific, \$64,000; Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, \$86,000; General Electric, \$14,000; Bombardier, \$45,000; Eaton's, \$15,000; Molson, \$53,000; Bank of Nova Scotia, \$76,000; Canadian Bankers Association, \$14,600; B.C. Inc., \$52,000. Incredible, the amounts that were given to the Liberal Party in 1993 in the middle of an election campaign. How can a government look after the interests of the average individual when it is financed by Canada's large corporations? Would the hon. member for Richelieu care to comment?

Mr. Plamondon: Madam Speaker, I am glad the hon. member asked this question. When I looked at political party funding for the 1993 election, I found that corporations like those you just mentioned, and others, such as Burns Fry, Onex Corporation, Molson, Rogers, CanWest Global, Unitel, and drug companies, such as Frosst, Apotex and Magna International, were the main contributors to Liberal Party coffers.

The major contributions you mentioned involved 24 ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, and six parliamentary secretaries who are sitting on the government benches. There are many conclusions we can draw from this.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak on Bill C-63, a bill which can save taxpayers as much as \$30 million per federal election.

Changes to the Canada Elections Act cannot be approached haphazardly. The implications are great and the subject matter is indeed critical.

This piece of legislation follows the report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, the Lortie commission, and the recommendations of Canada's chief electoral officer. Extensive consultation has taken place with opposition parties and by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Bill C-63 signifies a step forward for our electoral system. It takes advantage of modern information technology and, more important, it makes sense.

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The bill proposes the establishment of a permanent voters list, an automated register of Canadians qualified as electors. This permanent automated list would eliminate the need for outdated door to door enumeration. The register will be updated from existing federal, provincial and territorial data resources. This limited personal information will be used only with the consent of the electors involved. The federal statute governing privacy will apply and the transfer of data will be strictly regulated.

The information in the register of electors would be used solely for electoral purposes. Automation of the list will allow more time for electors to make revisions. If an elector's name or address is incorrect on the preliminary list or has been omitted, he or she will have 4 additional days to have the information corrected; 28 days rather than 24. Updating information will be easier. Providing an elector can prove his or her identity, some changes could in fact be made by phone.

The creation of a permanent register of electors will allow the current 47 day minimum election period to be shortened to 36 days. This shortening of the campaign period also responds to a call from Canadians who feel that 47 days is extravagant. The shorter minimum 36 day election calendar will involve major changes to the current 47 day calendar.

Spending limits and the preliminary list of electors will be available earlier. They will now be available to candidates on the 31st day before polling day.

As I have indicated, electors will have more time available for revision; 28 days rather than the existing 24. Electors will receive voting information earlier. Electors will receive a mailed notice confirming the dates and locations of the advance and regular polls by the 24th day before polling day. This way is much safer than the old system. Under the current 47 day calendar notices are left at the door by enumerators.

These changes make perfect sense to me and they are going to save Canadian taxpayers money. Door to door enumeration for each election is time consuming and expensive. Up to 110,000 enumerators have to be hired and trained and their work monitored. Costs are incurred at the federal level and by the provinces, the territories, the municipalities and the school boards which conduct enumerations. The fact is, door to door enumeration is the single most costly part of an election for taxpayers.

The single most costly part of the last election for the Tories was stating that federal elections are neither the time nor the place for debating public policy. Their most costly mistake, one which both they and the Reform Party seem destined to make again, was underestimating the Canadian public's concern about its country's future, its understanding of the issues of the day and its ability to make rational decisions.

• (1315)

One need only look at the Reform Party's false start program to see that this is true. The Reform approach to the economy could actually jeopardize the achievement of a balanced budget in the near future, increase fiscal uncertainty and stall investment and job creation. This sketchy plan is in marked contrast to the measured, proven Liberal government's two-track approach which is already achieving outstanding success.

Under the Liberal government, Canada has the lowest interest rates since the 1950s. That is making a real difference to real people. Someone renewing a one-year mortgage of \$100,000 will save over \$3,000 annually. Let us be honest, job creation is not and never has been part of the Reform Party's plan. It is only now starting to realize that jobs are the top priority for Canadians. Its platform has no credibility. It just does not add up.

The Reform Party proposes to increase transfers for health and education by \$4 billion, allocate \$10 billion to repaying the debt and cut taxes by \$12 billion. How, one may ask? That is an excellent question and one that Canadian voters will ask come election time. The problem is that the Reform Party cannot answer it.

What we know is that the Reform proposal will make the tax system less fair, benefiting the wealthy at the expense of those less fortunate. Liberals believe that any changes should be targeted and benefit those in need. The Canadian people know this. This is exactly how this country was built.

I am not going to discredit every idea or proposal made in the false start document. Quite frankly, I think our time can be better spent doing other things—

An hon. member: Like talking about the bill.

Mr. Bevilacqua:—for example justice. Someone unfamiliar with Canada who looked through *Hansard* reading only Reform Party statements about crime, he or she would think we live in one of the most violent countries in the history of civilization. However, we do not.

The fact is that the crime rate fell last year as it has for the past four years. The government took a comprehensive approach to crime and justice and it is paying off. However, those facts seem to elude our friends across the way. After promising to do politics differently, they have resorted to extremism, hot button politics. Canadians are smarter than that.

Then there are the Tories. Some people ask: Where are they? They are here. One would think that after the 1993 election the Tories would have realized they are not in tune with the wants and needs of Canadians, but it is not so. They just carry on doing what they do best, looking after their friends at the expense of others.

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The two tiered health care system, an end to new seniors' benefits are the type of approach the Tories plan to take.

Bill C-63 reflects the realities of today. Technology has helped us streamline the electoral process. It will result in savings of \$130 million over the next six elections. Also, Canadians today are informed about the issues that affect them. They have the right and ability to express their views and, in my mind, during an election campaign it is the best possible time to do so. When they look at the record of the government I know which way this country is going in the next election.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member who just spoke. I agree we could save \$120 million or \$130 million, but the maximum could have been higher.

• (1320)

The government could have saved \$150 million, in other words, an additional \$20 million or \$30 million, if it had agreed to use electoral lists prepared in the province of Quebec, for instance. This list, which is quite recent, does not meet the 12-month criteria but only just.

So why do the Liberals not stop their nitpicking and adopt the electoral list that has just been drawn up? This list is pretty recent, in fact so recent it would be impossible to have one more up to date because it takes so long to compile the data.

My question is the following. Is it not just to give Liberal organizers in the ridings a chance to go door to door and fill in the list at 75 cents or \$1 a shot, so that the legislation will be used as an excuse to give more money to the friends of the Liberal Party in Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Bevilacqua: Madam Speaker, it may be the impression of the hon. member that this is some kind of cynical political ploy. It is not. Quite frankly, when we are looking at savings of \$30 million per election the Canadian taxpayers who, after all, pay for these elections would applaud this move by the federal government.

May I add that in all of the discussions I have had in and outside my riding in the province of Ontario and with members of the Quebec community that people are quite happy we are introducing automation, that we are introducing technology in the election campaign, that we are saving the type of money we are. Over one hundred million dollars is quite a few dollars to save.

Given the fact that Canadians want more and greater accountability for every tax dollar that is invested, whether it is in the electoral process or government programs we will find that this bill has widespread support from British Columbia to Newfoundland. The issue of automation and technology is something about which I am personally quite pleased.

The creation of a permanent voters' list is something that I personally advocated back in 1990 when I was making my contribution as a member of Parliament. I say this with a bit of experience, representing an area with 260,000 people. A permanent voters' list certainly would have benefited myself and the electoral process back in 1988 when I ran for the first time. The people of York North will in large measure support the initiatives that I stated in this bill and that the government has clearly outlined in the legislation.

Mr. Andy Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act, in particular as it pertains to three elements. I would like to address establishing a permanent electoral list, implementing a shorter campaign period and staggering the voting hours across the country.

The first element of the bill deals with the question of a permanent electoral list. I believe that such a list will be better for Canadians because it will eliminate the recurring need to have approximately 100,000 enumerators going door to door and it will save hundreds of millions of dollars.

Just as important is the fact that by having a permanent list, one that we can all work with as members of Parliament, will include Canadians better in the political process and will provide the opportunity for us as members of Parliament to communicate better with our constituents not only during an election campaign but between elections.

• (1325)

For example, I can see the opportunity to keep track of all the correspondence, to identify areas of interest and really build an informed database that will allow us to seek the opinions of our constituents. It will allow us to provide the education and information to our constituents on various issues of the day. It will be much more reliable as a database than what is currently available to us.

What makes this even more important is that we are moving toward new technologies. I am sure as members of Parliament we are all going to be faced with more and more interventions from constituents who have access to technology like the Internet. People will use various types of mechanisms to contact a member of Parliament which is important. That makes it more important for us to ensure we can get to the people who do not have access to those technologies which is one of the things a permanent list would accomplish.

A permanent list will make it easier for us to keep track of information. It will make it easier for constituents to access the list, for example, younger Canadians who are moving a lot, people who live in rooming houses, people who live in places such that the current system does not accommodate them. Having gone through many elections, not necessarily as a candidate but at the poll level, there are always problems getting people on the lists. The

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permanent register brings a lot more certainty to the process, a lot more consistency, and is much more democratic.

There is a second important element of the bill. We are going to have a shorter campaign period. This is good public policy for two reasons. First, a shorter campaign period de-emphasizes the importance of spending on the campaign itself. The issue of money, of the ability to raise it, of the ability to conduct an elaborate campaign will be less important. Obviously if there is less time, the advantage of financially well-heeled candidates will diminish, which is good for democracy.

The shorter campaign period also de-emphasizes the impact of the campaign itself. What we are talking about now is having a choice made by constituents that may be measured a little more by the performance of the candidates, the government or the party over a longer period of time. There will be de-emphasis of the campaign and emphasis on one's community record. There will be emphasis on the performance, good or bad, of the government. Those may be more important considerations for electors to apply.

If we de-emphasize the campaign by making it shorter, there will be a greater tendency for people to vote on broader issues. We all know that during the course of a campaign the measures that are applied have to do with a candidate's ability to function in front of a television camera or their ability to speak before the public. Members of Parliament also know that those abilities are not nearly as important as one's ability to get the job done. It is important that we be measured as candidates in those terms and not necessarily on the basis of the others I mentioned.

The third element is the staggered voting hours across the country which is only fair. Then the outcomes of the election will not be known in the west prior to people voting. It is a good proposal that brings a greater sense of inclusion to all parts of Canada.

There is a great sense of alienation, whether geographic, socio-economic or gender based. Whatever the source of alienation it is obviously something that governments, political parties and this institution should be constantly trying to improve on. I see this provision as a fundamental response to the tenet that Canadians must feel the system works. If you are voting when you know full well that a government has already been formed, you may not believe the system works. I would find it personally offensive.

With the new rules in place the voting will be staggered. This will allow voting to occur in a way that lends itself more to everybody feeling included. I welcome the fact that those amendments were made in a fashion that would also be sensitive to the fact that no one in Atlantic Canada would want to be voting at midnight. A reasonable accommodation has occurred.

• (1330)

I also pay tribute to the member for Vancouver East for her many interventions. As a hardworking member of Parliament she deserves to be acknowledged for her efforts in this regard.

It is important to deal with the question of alienation and making our constituents feel included in the process. In my case over the past three years I have held a number of public policy forums, the 18th of which was held last Sunday. These are pretty elaborate affairs where people in the constituency have an opportunity to debate the issues of the day. A week ago we discussed the upcoming budget. I was given direction by my constituents as to how I should approach any opportunity I may have to influence the outcome of the budget.

The types of reforms we are talking about today are consistent with that inclusion for the reasons I mentioned. I know it is difficult for all of us because we are constantly caught up in the crisis of the day in this place. From time to time we all let our guard down or we become a little less conscious of the need to consult. Again we have to be reminded on occasion.

There have been other attempts at electoral reforms in the last couple of years and not all were as positive for the country. The boundary redistribution which is coming into effect was poorly thought out.

I presented a motion on July 12 last year to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs objecting to the provisions of the report as it related to New Brunswick. The commission failed to respect the community of interest by dividing the greater Fredericton area into urban and rural ridings.

The area that surrounds Fredericton is now lost to another riding, a wonderful riding that I am sure you, Madam Speaker, will well represent long into the future. However, there is no logical connection with the Saint John River valley as has been determined by the redistribution system.

The outlying regions of Fredericton feel a strong attachment to that city. They receive all their federal services from that city. It was not a useful exercise to detach them from their logical place. It does not lend anything to our desire to have people feel included and to have some sense of continuity in the political process, regardless of which political party those constituents support. I believe it was an honest attempt at improving the boundaries, but it failed miserably in that measure.

I very much support not only the idea behind Bill C-63, but also how it will implement those ideas. We need to do everything we can to enhance our ability as members of Parliament to establish an honest daily relationship with all our constituents. A permanent list will allow that to happen. Minimizing the campaign makes us more accountable for our activities between elections. It also minimizes

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the impact of money on the outcome. Of course by having a permanent list it will save Canadians millions of dollars.

With that, I encourage all members of the House to support the bill.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the two previous speakers. One thing that was very evident is that an election is obviously looming. The reason I say that is twofold. One is because of the increased rhetoric from the other side of the House.

Mr. Assadourian: Oh, come on. That is not true.

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River): Now the rhetoric is really increasing. They are trying to drown out my intervention.

Anytime members opposite attack the Reform Party's fresh start program, we know they must be in trouble with it. Otherwise they would not give all that time in the House of Commons to draw it to the attention of the Canadian people.

• (1335)

The government is saying this bill is going to save taxpayers a lot of money in having a permanent electors list. If the government is really interested in saving taxpayers money as it says it is, why then would it not have put into this bill a repeal of the election rebates that are granted to all parties and candidates who run in elections?

If the government wants to save money, it should quit rebating the election expenses. This would be one way the government could save millions upon millions of dollars and yet it does not want to do it. Why? Certainly this has been part of the Reform Party's platform since the party was formed some nine years ago. If Reform were the government that is one of the changes we would make. If the government is interested in saving money, why would it not do that?

Also, if this is such a terrific piece of legislation, why is the government afraid to debate it? Why did it have to bring in time allocation and force this legislation through in a very short period of time? If it is a good piece of legislation and if it was so clearly thought out as previous speakers have said, why are so many amendments being brought forward?

Mr. Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Madam Speaker, the hon. member noted that because of comments made by members on this side of the House that obviously an election is looming. I would suggest that we knew an election was looming because all the Reformers are quitting. Clearly it is a matter that they know full well it is better to get out now than to be asked to get out later.

Saving money is very important. I appreciate the question because it distinguishes between us very well. The reason there is public money involved in the political process is to diminish the importance of private money in the political process. It is that simple. A poor person who seeks office does not have the kind of money to put together and run a campaign. Consequently the public interest is served by public participation in financing elections. It is that simple. Clearly that is the difference between us.

Finally, I have to acknowledge the irony of what the hon. member is saying. In one paragraph the hon. member is asking why would we not want to have more debate and at the same time he is asking if this is such a good piece of legislation, why all the amendments? Clearly those are two completely inconsistent observations but I am not surprised.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on the theme raised by my colleague that there must be an election imminent. The way those members are talking, they are so afraid of our fresh start program.

The member just before mentioned how wonderfully low the interest rates are and how anybody borrowing money on a mortgage now can save so much money. That is exactly Liberal think: you have to borrow money in order to get a benefit. Is that not wonderful? What if people do not want to borrow money? They are stuck with the high taxes. In fact if you borrow \$200,000 you will get the same benefit as Reform's tax reductions.

It is Liberal think to say that low interest rates are a fantastic benefit. They are only a benefit if you borrow money. It is totally ridiculous. How can the hon. member justify that sort of approach where it is a benefit to borrow money instead of to reduce taxes?

Mr. Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Madam Speaker, I will use the opportunity to answer the previous speaker's question because he was wondering why we did not engage in more debate. The answer is because of the quality of debate just offered by this questioner. I did not mention a fresh start. I did not mention interest rates. I did not mention any of those things. Clearly it is good evidence as to why we can exhaust this debate as quickly as we will.

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I will be dividing my time with the member for Fraser Valley East.

• (1340)

A number of the issues on Bill C-63 have been addressed by my colleague from Calgary West in terms of the specifics and where the Reform Party stands. I want to take on one comment that my colleague made in his remarks. He said that this bill which is supposedly to deal with some of the alienation in the west is not the solution to that alienation and the concerns that we have in western Canada. For example, changing the polling hours so that we do not

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know the results of the vote in Ontario, Quebec and the maritimes does not satisfy western Canada in terms of alienation.

Many of the Reform members who stand in this House are here because of the longstanding problems we have had with those in central Canada who do not have ears to listen to our problems. We are here to try to set those issues clearly before this assembly. For years the Tories and the Liberals have been on this side and then on that side of the House, but their ears have remained completely deaf to the issues of western Canada. The many times they have patronized us out in the west they have done it with little things which they throw out on the table.

Bill C-63 is just another one of those things. The government has changed the voting hours. There are 12 hours in which to vote and the government has tried to adjust it so that we cannot find out through today's technology how people voted in other places. And we are supposed to be satisfied with that and say how wonderful.

Other patronizing things have happened in this House as well which are just as unacceptable. There is crime in this country. There are youth who are committing adult crimes and this is totally unacceptable. I hear people across the way, including the member for York North, talk about the fresh start program of Reformers not having credibility. We have spent three and a half years in this assembly and the Liberal government has not dealt with the issue of crime.

What has the government done? There has been nothing to deal with the issue of crime but to register the guns of the innocent people of Canada. That is what the government has done. A big bill and a lot of fanfare and it is a bill the government cannot even implement for Canadians. That is what the government has given to Canadians.

It is not only the issue of crime but also other problems this country has. Reformers presented to this House an option for unity that if Quebec is to stay, should we not decentralize some powers. The government says things are good enough the way they are, that if it gives good government they should be satisfied. It is not resolving the matter. It continues. Western Canadian alienation continues. These little titbits get rolled out on the floor and the government thinks we should be satisfied, not only in Quebec but out in the west and that we should keep quiet.

It is just not good enough. We see it symbolized in the intent of this elections act which is before us today. The government has to do better.

The hon. member for North York spoke a few moments ago on this bill. He talked about budgeting and numbers and so on. There was a group of individuals representing the Liberal Party which sat for eight years on this side of the House. That group had eight years to do some work, eight years to prepare for government.

We came back for the session in 1994-95 and there was no legislation. We got a zero budget which had no indication or direction, no deficit reduction when Canadians were screaming for deficit reduction. We had to wait a whole fiscal year before the government woke up to what was needed in Canada.

• (1345)

Today the Reform Party has presented to Canadians a credible option so that when it is government it can walk into government and deal with it. If the Liberals had that kind of thought in mind we would have had a better government. We would not have a deficit of \$27 billion today; we would have been closer to the \$17 billion the Minister of Finance has targeted for another year.

This government always puts out things for symbolic reasons to try to fool the people of Canada, rather than doing something which has substance. That is the case with the bill which is before us at this time.

What should have happened in this term of office? It is time for the government to recognize that the regions of the country, western Canada and even Quebec, should have better representation. It is time for it to recognize that senators should be elected rather than put in the other House by patronage appointments. There have been at least two senators appointed during the 35th Parliament. They have been sent up to the other House and are in that Liberal haven of milk and honey until the age of 75. What a giveaway of public money. There is no accountability.

That would have been something of substance which would have helped western Canada, rather than the amendment that gave us different polling hours. There should be an elected Senate, an effective Senate and one which has equal representation. That would bring something better to the Canadian scenario than what we have before us at the moment.

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a brief comment with respect to my colleague's remarks.

I would point out to him that the proposal of his party to decentralize government in this country as a means of solving our unity problems has obviously been rejected by the majority of Canadians, as is witnessed by where the party stands in the polls. The majority of Canadians realize that if the country has a weak central government we will be playing into the hands of the separatists, both the separatists in Quebec and the separatists in western Canada.

I believe that Canadians are wiser than the Reform Party, which is reflected in where it stands in the polls.

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Madam Speaker, I would like to give a quick response to that utterance.

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The Canadian people are mature and responsible. Provinces are responsible entities in this country. They have shown that they can manage their public affairs and their fiscal affairs much better than the federal government, which is so centralized. Who has the big debt in the country which amounts to \$600 billion? Who has the deficit in the country? The federal Liberal government. Who has looked after the deficit and debt in this country? Eight of the provinces. When will the federal government, the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and the member who has just spoken stand to say they have a balanced budget, which eight of the provinces have?

When they have fiscal and social policies which are reflective of the Canadian people then the member can say what he has said. Under the circumstances today, the Liberal federal government has no credibility to be the guardian of the needs of Canadians.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Don Valley North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I followed the comments of the hon. member who said that during the last three and a half years the Reform Party provided good leadership in the House. If that is the case, why is the Reform Party standing at 11 per cent in the national polls? It is sinking in Alberta and in the rest of the west.

What would the hon. member suggest we do, go back to the old system where the rich and powerful control the House? Or does he want to adopt our revision of the Canada Elections Act so it will be open to each and every citizen in this land, no matter where they come from, on an equal basis?

• (1350)

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Madam Speaker, in the period 1984 to 1993 the Tories led this country. They had majority governments and could take legislation or fiscal policy in any direction they wanted. They were high in the polls. The new leader, Kim Campbell, was infallible. They had answers to a thousand questions. However, when the worm turned and the Canadian people saw through the facade, the Tory government ended up with two people in the back row and not even a recognized party.

Therefore the hon. member had better remember the lessons of this House. Those who are irresponsible, those who continue to put this country into debt and those who try to fool the Canadian people will end up as a minority party, unrecognized in this House as well.

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Waterloo, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would first like to say that we have some good representation coming from western Canada. Certainly the member for Vancouver East is one of those people. She has worked long and hard on the issue.

In terms of western alienation, I really have to take exception to the member for Lethbridge. Let us not forget that the member for Lethbridge, before coming to this House, was a member of a Progressive Conservative cabinet. While that member waxed eloquently in this House about all the evils of big government, let me

tell him that since he has been in this House collecting a salary as a member of Parliament, he has also collected a pension of somewhere around \$200,000 from the taxpayers in the province of Alberta.

All I can say to the member for Lethbridge is shame.

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Madam Speaker, as always, the hon. member's mathematics is as inaccurate and unaccountable as the budget of the Liberal government.

The hon. member did not tell my constituents back home that I have given them over \$30,000 in donations out of my salary to a variety of things. Did he do that? Did this hon. member refuse to take a federal pension? Did this hon. member tell Canadians and his constituents he will not take a federal pension which will most likely put a million dollars in his pocket? No, he did not. Did he tell Canadians that 50 Reform members of Parliament have said they will not take a federal pension which will most likely save Canadians \$50 million? Well, he should.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting how this debate has evolved today. It is kind of like ever expanding circles. We start on one subject and pretty soon away we go. It is kind of fun here today to see the Liberals squirm as we talk a bit about western alienation and not just western alienation but about changes that are necessary to the democratic process, the electoral system and the parliamentary system in order to make this place accountable to the Canadian voters, the people who actually sent us here, and to make the parties more responsible to the people whose vote they are trying to woo.

What it comes down to of course is the basic supposition when it comes to elections in Parliament of whose chair is this anyway. I am not going to hold up the chair and use it as a prop but that is the basic question. Does this chair belong to a political party or does it belong to the people in the riding?

The basic question the Liberals should be asking is how can we ensure that this chair represents the views of the people, in my case those of Fraser Valley East. I would put forward the proposition that what has brought this House into such a low level of self-esteem and such a low level of public opinion is the fact that people who get elected to this place think they own this chair and if they do not own it then the political party that they are apart of owns it. Until they get that straight they are not going to be able to put to rest the fears of the Canadian people that this place is not representative of the Canadian people.

• (1355)

Why when we talk about western alienation and when I try to convince and talk to the minister in charge of our national unity portfolio that distinct society is driving the country apart instead of bringing the country together, he stands there and says he will go on a tour of this country again and convince western Canadians that they have to take this distinct society? He said in B.C. that they should just give a bit more and accept it.

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It is no wonder they cannot get it straight over there about what the purpose of this place is and the purpose of representative government.

The purpose is to find those things that we have in common which draw us together, not to emphasize the differences of Canadians. I hear them say that we need to recognize the distinct society clause because it will put to rest the national unity crisis. This is the government that came within 50,000 votes of losing the country, the government that had no game plan, no plan (a) or (b), no plan at all to address the Quebec issue. Instead, it rolled along saying "we think it is okay and if we just push this distinct society thing down somebody's throat, somehow that will bring the country together".

The Liberals are not listening and they are not learning. They have yet to understand the principle at stake here. The principle is that the chair I sit in does not belong to the Reform Party; it belongs to the people of Fraser Valley East. And when I stand and speak on their behalf, I expect the government to listen and I expect the people to listen. If I am not doing my job, then I have not done it as I understand democratic representation.

There will be more about this after question period because I am not finished with these guys yet.

The Speaker: I do not know about the rest of you, but I am coming back here at three o'clock.

* * *

REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, Volume III, dated November 1996. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(d), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

It being almost two o'clock, we will proceed to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 17 per cent unemployment among our youth ages 15 to 24 is a waste of Canada's precious resources.

Idle time in one's prime income earning years will negatively impact financial security for the individual and is a waste of potential energy for the nation as a whole. Couple this with the fact

that representatives of our high tech companies tell us time and time again that they cannot find suitable entry level qualified applicants. Some say they need to hire outside of our country to fill these challenging and high paying jobs.

We have an enormous mismatch between places of work and places of education. Our government has recognized the importance of improving entry level skills by initiating a youth internship program, a program I am happy to say is active in schools in my riding. We also have Youth Services Canada and we have doubled the funding for summer employment programs.

It will be important for all levels of government as well as businesses to work together in finding intuitive solutions to what has become a tremendous detriment for our youth and our nation as well.

* * *

TECHNOLOGY FIRMS

Mr. John Cummins (Delta, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the former head of the B.C. Science Council, Haig Farris, has dismissed the federal government's \$30 million investment in Ballard Power Systems as political fertilizer that fails to deal with the real problems facing junior technology firms.

Those problems, he said, include a tax regime that makes it difficult if not impossible for young technology firms to attract capital to finance growth, making salaries less attractive than those in the U.S. Additionally, Farris said, Canadian immigration policies make it difficult to recruit top people to manage and grow advanced technology firms. He said the federal loan was political: "The government was just under so much heat to do something out west after giving that money to Bombardier." That is not the solution.

British Columbians and Canadians interested in developing the high technology sector need a tax regime sensitive to their special needs. Such a tax regime would make better use of taxpayers dollars than the present system of politically motivated giveaways that attempts to play one region of the country off against another.

* * *

TRI MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

Mrs. Georgette Sheridan (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Tony Towstey and Tri Media Productions of Saskatoon.

Thanks to Tony's determination, corporate communication skills and a lot of hard work, Saskatoon can now boast its first ever feature film to be shot entirely in the city. The movie is called "Dead End". While that may be a good title for the film it is a poor description of many positive spin-offs its production means to Saskatoon.

The video post-production will be done on Tri Media's digital editing equipment, crucial for high quality projects in the future. Production will increase business for Saskatoon's hotels, restaurants and support industries. Local people will be employed on both sides of the camera developing a talent pool for future projects.

Tri Media Productions is another small business success story.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REHABILITATION OF YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, the justice and judicial affairs committee heard stakeholders from every region of Canada as it toured the country. The purpose of its tour was to gather ideas about what changes should be included in the bill to amend the Young Offenders Act.

The Bloc Québécois applauds this clear shift toward diversion programs. I do hope the minister will recognize that providing young people with rehabilitation opportunities is a key objective and that a justice system that tries to keep our youth out of prison really is the way of the future.

The people of Quebec are proud to see that Quebec's initiative in the administration of justice for young offenders has become an example that provinces and organizations in Canada have chosen to follow.

* * *

[*English*]

BRAMALEA—GORE—MALTON

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I was at a press conference in the riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton for the launch of a community-wide initiative to make Brampton "the safest city in Canada".

This announcement was made possible in no small part thanks to this Liberal government's willingness to keep its safe homes, safe streets red book commitments.

In July 1994, for instance, it established the National Crime Prevention Council, a body that works to unify crime prevention efforts across Canada. Organizations to be encouraged on the campaign include the Brampton Crime Prevention Association, Peel Regional Police, Bramalea Police Advisory Committee, Brampton Transit, Northern Telecom, Springdale Developments, Bramalea Jaycees, Block Parents, the Downtown Business Improvement Association, Business Crime Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, Brampton Family, and Girl Guides of Canada.

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THE LATE CLARKE ROLLINS

Mr. Larry McCormick (Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to share a few memories of a long serving elected politician, Mr. Clarke Rollins, who passed away on November 25.

Clarke Rollins was born on December 14, 1911 at Coe Hill in the county of Hastings where he grew up, was educated, married and raised his three children with his wife Beverley (Hurley) Rollins. Mr. Rollins began his political career at the municipal level where he served eight years as the reeve of the Township of Wollaston before becoming warden in 1950.

In 1959 Mr. Rollins was first elected to the Ontario legislature, remaining through five subsequent elections. Mr. Rollins was the self-described country member. Throughout his career he focused on the grassroots issues of importance to the people he served.

Mr. Rollins shared his insights and wisdoms with me when I tossed my hat into the ring in 1993. I am grateful for the kind advice and the hand of friendship he extended to a novice in the political arena.

I will remember the warm man who sincerely cared for the people of Hastings-Peterborough. I extend my sincere sympathy to Mrs. Rollins and family.

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[*Translation*]

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, during Oral Question Period, the hon. member for Saint-Jean stated, and I quote: "This may well be question period, but it is certainly not answer period".

The reaction of several of the ministers and members opposite who were in the House at the time was to reply: "You have been in Ottawa for three years but never realized that until today?"

The purpose of Oral Question Period is to request information from the government and make it account for its actions before the House of Commons. It is an important way of controlling democracy in Canada.

When I hear certain ministers boasting about not participating in this democratic process and making a mockery of it, I feel deceived by and disappointed in a government that respects neither the laws and principles of democracy nor, for that matter, the people of Canada and Quebec.

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• (1405)

[English]

TORONTO

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the lack of interest the Liberal government shows toward Toronto is a constant source of amazement to me. Recently the intergovernmental affairs committee of metro council held a meeting to discuss federal issues in the greater Toronto area.

There are 36 members of Parliament in the GTA, all Liberals. They were all invited to the meeting but only two showed up. The House was not sitting that week, so lack of attendance was not the result of these members being in Ottawa.

One can only assume that the dismal representation was a result of the Liberal government's indifference to Canada's largest city. Even their own supporters are annoyed by the Liberals' taking Toronto for granted. "I'm really amazed", said metro councillor Anne Johnston, "I'm saying publicly as a sometime Liberal how shocked I am about the lack of attention paid to Toronto".

This disinterest is not limited to the GTA members of Parliament. The Prime Minister, with 36 Toronto MPs to choose from, opted to have the hon. member for Windsor West as the minister responsible for the GTA. Surely there is at least one member from Toronto who could fill the job, or was no one interested?

* * *

CANDU REACTOR

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Sierra Club and Energy Probe for taking the government to task and to court for the way the government exempted the sale of the CANDU nuclear reactor to China from all its environmental assessment procedures. The government has shown a certain form of arrogance and even authoritarianism in exempting this project from environmental assessment.

We have come a long way since the Brundtland commission when governments of the day continually talked about how they were going to assess everything for environmental consequences. Recently we have seen rail abandonments and all kinds of other policies being implemented without environmental assessment, but this is the straw that breaks the camel's back.

We have a government that has exempted this project and by so doing has set a terrible precedent. We can only wish that the Sierra Club and Energy Probe succeed in taking this government successfully to court and in having this decision overturned.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO KHAKI CLUB

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to the Kitchener-Waterloo Khaki Club of Wellesley, Ontario, co-sponsors of the 1997 world horseshoe pitching tournament.

For the first time in 79 years the World Horseshoe Championships will be held in a location outside the United States. Organizers predict that some 1,500 Canadian players will join thousands of competitors from around the world at the Kitchener-Waterloo Khaki Club and the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium from July 12-27, 1997. At the same time, estimates suggest this tournament will have a positive financial effect in the area of over \$25 million.

I encourage Canadians to make plans to attend the this exciting event and I wish the Kitchener-Waterloo Khaki Club all the best for a successful tournament.

* * *

CANADIAN HEMOPHILIA SOCIETY

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Hemophilia Society has named November hemophilia month. Approximately 2,400 Canadians are affected by this inherited condition which is characterized by a failure in the body's blood clotting mechanisms.

The Canadian Hemophilia Society is dedicated to providing persons with hemophilia and other inherited bleeding disorders with information and support. The society also raises funds for research to find a cure and provide more effective treatment.

A number of my constituents suffer from hemophilia. The challenges they face are considerable. They are member of a community which must deal with three chronic disorders: hemophilia itself, hemophiliacs infected with HIV and hemophiliacs with hepatitis C.

The Canadian Hemophilia Society is performing a vital service by providing sufferers of this condition with support and education. The federal government has an important role to play. We can ease the suffering of hemophiliacs by ensuring that we are responsive to their needs, by actively seeking their input on government policy and by making it a priority to deal with issues they identify as being of greatest concern.

Please join me in congratulating the Canadian Hemophilia Society for its work and in wishing the organization a successful campaign during hemophilia month.

[Translation]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some Montreal residents were recently the victims of vandalism when the Canadian flags they proudly displayed in front of their house were burned.

These incidents are sad in that the freedom of expression of those citizens was violated. Such incidents reflect an intolerance which must not, regardless of the price to pay, become more prevalent in a country known for its respect for democracy.

I ask my colleagues, particularly the Bloc Quebecois leader, and also the Quebec Minister of Justice, to join me in condemning these acts and immediately.

Should such incidents become too common, they would likely jeopardize some of our country's basic assets, namely the freedom of expression and the freedom of speech, which are both closely associated with a modern society such as ours.

* * *

● (1410)

LILIANE MACDONALD-STEWART

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, Liliane Macdonald-Stewart was dubbed Knight of the Legion of Honour in Paris.

The generosity and dynamism of the chairperson of the Macdonald-Stewart foundation are well known. In addition to chairing the Stewart museum on Île Sainte-Hélène, and the decorative arts museum in château Dufresne, the foundation also supports medical and university research.

The Legion of Honour was awarded to Mrs. Macdonald-Stewart in recognition of her remarkable involvement in presenting and preserving the cultural and historical heritage of France and Quebec.

Members of the Bloc Quebecois congratulate this great Montrealer for a well deserved recognition.

* * *

[English]

TOBACCO LEGISLATION

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal legislation on tobacco to stop our kids from smoking hits a major cabinet snag that looks like they were joking.

The reasons for the hold-up are pretty plain to see
The list prepared would have one scared if not for Minister D.
So powerful and confident that he could state no joke
If Liberals do not bring this bill into law
Liberals don't deserve your vote.

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But problems have arisen; big lobbyists strike home
And cabinet in-fighting leaves our Mr. D alone.
Swinging from a shaky limb
He'll attempt to bring tobacco back like a rocket
Hoping that we don't notice the secret stogies in his pocket.

* * *

[Translation]

NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister of Canada has announced today, in Shanghai, the sale of two Candu reactors to China.

As the Prime Minister said, this sale confirms Canada's leadership role in the area of nuclear technology.

This contract is a direct spinoff of the work done by Team Canada in 1994.

It is estimated that this \$4 billion contract, including \$1.5 billion in Canadian content, will generate direct and indirect jobs equivalent to 27,000 person-years in Canada over the next six years.

Here is another concrete measure that shows job creation is our government's number one priority.

* * *

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, a young francophone couple from my riding who had displayed both the Canadian flag and the Quebec fleurdelisé flag in front of their house had their Canadian flag burned.

A week earlier, James Healy, from Montreal, had received a warning that his Canadian flag would be burned if he did not take it down.

[English]

There is nothing more precious in our lives than freedom of expression and our freedom to live and act peacefully as free citizens in a free country. Threats and intimidation are the stuff of bullies and of cowards. All of us here represent the very freedom of democratic life.

Let us join together to denounce intimidation in all its forms and to proclaim our faith in the fundamental rights and liberties of an open and free society. Long live freedom of expression.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about the erosion of universal health care in some provinces, notably Ontario. A Canada-wide health net is more, not less, important in difficult financial times like these. Canadians need the confidence of knowing that they can get good care when they feel sick.

Oral Questions

In Ontario fees have been introduced for prescription drugs. Many people arrive at the pharmacy without knowing that they have to pay. It is a shock to them that there is an extra fee and it is even more of a shock that the pharmacist appears to know their income. Now Ontario is going to charge sick people waiting in hospitals for a transfer to other care facilities.

I realize that the financial circumstances of the federal government are difficult. As a result, these are dangerous times for the only level of government that can enforce national standards in areas such as health. Difficult though it may be, I urge the federal government to do everything in its power to preserve universal, single tier health care in Canada.

* * *

• (1415)

JUSTICE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when I was in grade 8 we studied the story of Jean Valjean, a hungry man who spent 19 years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread. Our hearts were pierced by that obvious injustice.

A similar story unfolds before us in Canada. Since July 7 Andy McMechan has sat in a Manitoba jail with murderers because he wanted a better price for his waxy barley. Liberals felt this was a crime and only the small, indefensible guys get picked on. After shopping around they found a sympathetic judge who would teach Andy a lesson and make an example of him to keep farmers in line.

This government lets child predators roam our streets and even sets murderers free. Is this Liberal justice? Is this freedom?

I introduced a property rights bill, but the Liberals would not even allow a vote on it. Do we not have freedom of contract in Canada?

The Prime Minister is afraid to challenge the atrocities in China but maybe he could look at the injustice here in Canada.

I support the Canadian Wheat Board as a marketing tool option for farmers, but surely it does not mean this. Let Andy go home for Christmas to be with his family.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general has just released another report

crammed full of extravagant expenditures, expenditures that are the result of federal mismanagement. In fact, more than \$2.5 billion in needless expenditures are itemized in the auditor general's report for 1996 alone.

Does the President of Treasury Board realize that, if he had done his job properly, if the government had managed the taxpayers' money properly, it would have saved almost half the money it swiped from the UI fund surplus?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I myself met with the auditor general yesterday morning for a briefing on his report.

He pointed out to me once again that his report was essentially positive and optimistic. He also indicated that for the first time he could say there was improvement in nearly every area. Perhaps it is coming about a bit more slowly than he would have liked, but the situation is improving.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is the problem we run into with this government. Blinded by his own arrogance, it is impossible for the President of Treasury Board to admit his errors with humility. He simply cannot do it. Two billion and a half is nothing to sneeze at.

The auditor general has estimated that the government could have saved up to \$1.25 billion just by managing its stocks better. How can the President of Treasury Board be boasting about putting public finances in order, when his neglecting to do an item-by-item examination of government expenditures has resulted, for Public Works and Government Services alone, in losses amounting to \$1.25 billion?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certain that there is always room for improvement in all questions relating to management, whether in the private sector or in government. However, the federal government has implemented two years ago a comprehensive program review which the auditor general found to be excellent.

Yes, there are problems with certain aspects of our management. In order to give a clearer picture of the tone of the auditor general's report, in the very area referred to by the leader of the opposition, stock management, here is what the auditor general said in his report: "We are encouraged by initiatives taken by the departments and currently in place. Major efforts are now under way in some organizations which have reviewed and simplified their policies and now have a clearer definition of their role, their responsibilities and their expenditures. We draw particular attention to the efforts made to capitalize many items which were previously incorrectly recorded under stock management".

Oral Questions

• (1420)

You can see that the auditor general himself supports our efforts.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I used to be a teacher, and I have had students like the minister, who justified getting 6 per cent on an exam by saying that they had improved a great deal since last time, when they got zero. That is not good enough.

It is not good enough because, while the government is claiming to have done this exercise with great conscientiousness, a great deal of work, at the same time the Minister of National Defence, and former Minister of Human Resources, was cutting benefits to all of Canada's unemployed. While he was making those cuts, the President of Treasury Board was calmly examining expenditures, and another \$2.5 billion were wasted.

The government has overspent the information technologies budget by \$300 million. How can the President of Treasury Board, who is responsible for good government administration, justify such a terrible performance in his own department, having gone more than 30 per cent over budget?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition refers to one area, information technology, which is currently being developed and which is rife with problems for all governments, whatever the country, here or in the United States.

At this time we are busy trying to fine tune information systems so as to decrease the cost overages which sometimes occur.

In order to place the words of the Leader of the Opposition in proper perspective I refer you to what the auditor general had to say: "Our office—the office of the auditor general—supports the use of information technologies in order to control costs and improve services, and we endorse the efforts of the Treasury Board Secretariat to develop an improved framework for managing information and technology projects".

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister.

This morning, the auditor general discussed environmental issues. Regarding the 5,000 contaminated federal sites, the auditor general expressed his concern about the fact that the government was still unable to assess the health, safety and environmental risks and costs.

Considering that according to certain preliminary estimates, cost would total \$2 billion, not including the cost related to radioactive waste, and also considering that the public's health is at stake, when will the Deputy Prime Minister see to it that her government proceeds with the assessment requested by the auditor general?

• (1425)

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general made it clear, in referring to contamination problems which depend a lot on modern technology, that he wanted us to make a more exhaustive list of contaminated sites and the costs involved in cleaning up those sites.

That is exactly what we are doing now. Many departments have already started to compile these lists. It is sometimes very difficult to estimate the costs, but we are now setting up the requisite lists, with a description of the sites and estimates.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take advantage of the government's mellow mood to talk about radioactive waste. For five years, the auditor general has accused Atomic Energy of Canada Limited of failing to declare its environmental liabilities in its financial statements. And for five years, AECL has ignored repeated requests by the auditor general.

Is the Deputy Prime Minister prepared to promise, on behalf of the government, that she will urge AECL to act quickly on the repeated requests of the auditor general that AECL declare its environmental liabilities in its financial statements?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Let me assure him that AECL takes the comments of the auditor general as it relates to radioactive waste very seriously. A few weeks ago I met with the auditor general. I have discussed his concerns with my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and working together we are going to provide a solution to this problem in the very near future.

* * *

CANADIAN AIRLINES

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in the last week I have visited five provinces, flying on Canadian Airlines most of the way.

Surely it is important to this House that Canadian Airlines not only survives but that it is prosperous for the benefit of its workers, its investors and the travelling public.

We are all well aware that the Canadian government's balance sheet is worse than Canadian's, but one constructive thing the

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federal government can do to help is to ensure that Canadian Airlines operates on a level playing field both at home and abroad.

Reform Party says no to government bailouts but we say no to federal government inaction.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. What is this government doing to ensure a level playing field for Canadian Airlines International at home and abroad?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is saying the same line it has been saying for the last month. Canadian Airlines has to restructure in order to get on firm ground, in order to become a profitable company, in order to maximize its opportunities in this deregulated industry, in order to succeed. Quite frankly the government is not going to go there with a cheque.

The minister is there now facilitating discussions, doing everything he can, along with the Ministry of Transport, to see Canadian become a strong airline, along with Air Canada.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I assume that in that answer somewhere the government is in favour of a level playing field for Canadian at home and abroad. It is one of the things it can do.

We are wondering if there is not something the government can do in a practical sense to work out that commitment. One of the best ways for the federal government to make Canadian carriers more competitive is to cut the federal tax on fuel which costs them about \$95 million a year, \$32 million for Canadian alone.

The transportation minister said on Friday that he was open to lowering the federal tax on fuel and that he had had discussions with the Minister of Finance about it.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Will he lower the federal tax on aviation fuel and if so, by how much?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport has indicated that everything except deregulation is on the table. Once Canadian Airlines has restructured, he will come together with the company and the Canadian employees who work for the six unions, once they have become stable, and consider any request that Canadian Airlines has to make.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): As the member mentions, Canadian Airlines has put several restructuring proposals on the table and four of its six unions are now on side. Two of the largest unions, as the member knows, the CAW and CUPE, still have some concerns, and that is fine. What concerns us is that so far they have made no commitment to let their membership vote on the company's proposals.

• (1430)

Not just 16,000 jobs are at stake, but the security of 16,000 families with homes and mortgages and bills to pay. Canadian employees should have every right to have a say directly in a vote on their own future.

My question is for the Minister of Labour. Will the government guarantee that every employee of Canadian will be able to vote on the company's restructuring proposals?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add to the hon. member's comments because they are most welcome.

The minister said yesterday while he was in Richmond that great contributions were made by the workforce at Canadian. They are great people and they run a good airline. The trouble is the airline is not profitable. It lost \$1.2 billion over the last 10 years.

The addition I would like to make to the hon. member's question is that the leadership of the Canadian Auto Workers and CUPE have forgotten that it is not just the employees at Canadian Airlines who are taxpayers. The government also has a responsibility to look after the interests of all Canadian taxpayers: in my riding, the member's riding and every riding in the country. It has to ensure that their investment is looked after and that they are protected as well.

That is why we are encouraged and looking forward to the restructuring plan of Canadian. In that way the Canadian taxpayers are looked after as well as the 16,500 employees of Canadian of whom the hon. member speaks.

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[Translation]

KREVER COMMISSION

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Deputy Prime Minister stated in this House that her government was legally obliged to withhold the documents sought by the Krever commission. Section 39 of the Canada Evidence Act sets out no such obligation. Her own minister of justice in fact said it was possible to obtain documents from the years 1980 to 1984 under a special procedure, which involves applying to the Prime Minister of the time, namely, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and John Turner.

Is the Deputy Prime Minister prepared to undertake all the steps necessary to obtain the required authorizations to finally provide the documents to the Krever commission? In other words, is she prepared to seek the approval of her former leaders, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and John Turner, so we may finally know the truth about this tragedy?

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Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the member's remarks, I understand her to say that there is currently a section 39 preventing the present government from revealing events in other cabinets, that of Mr. Mulroney and others.

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a procedure whereby the government may shed some light on the contaminated blood scandal, as her colleague the minister of justice clearly stated.

Could the Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether her government is refusing to act or whether former Prime Ministers Pierre Elliott Trudeau and John Turner are refusing to release the documents sought by Mr. Justice Krever?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just repeat what I said yesterday in the House, which is, that section 39 of the Canada Evidence Act does not allow the present government to release confidential information concerning past governments including that of Mr. Mulroney and previous ones.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport said that the government has a responsibility to the taxpayers. Canadian Airlines is a taxpayer and so are its employees.

The government extracts \$95 million a year in federal fuel taxes from Canadian aviation companies, an input tax that was supposed to be taken away when the goods and services tax was introduced.

• (1435)

If the government is so concerned about Canadian taxpayers and Canadian jobs, why does it continue to extract this money from an industry that is in financial trouble?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to circumvent or just forget all about the real problem at Canadian Airlines.

Canadian Airlines is not making a profit. Canadian Airlines has to restructure. The people of Canada had to adjust to tough economic conditions by restructuring. Canadian Airlines has to do the same.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is fine to say that Canadian Airlines has to restructure but there should be some light at the end of the tunnel. There should not be a government waiting there with their tax barrel to fill it back up again at aviation's expense.

Since the hon. member, in answer to a previous question, stated that he believes that all Canadian's employees should be entitled to vote, what exactly is the government doing to ensure that will happen?

Mr. Stan Keyes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people who are members of CUPE and the CAW have to talk to their leadership and say: "We have heard what you have had to say. We have listened to your advice. Now we would like to put it to a vote". I think this is an issue that has to take place between the union membership and its leadership.

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[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice explained his inaction in the matter of casinos on international cruises by saying we would have to await a request from the Government of Quebec. However, in 1995, the National Assembly of Quebec passed a bill in this regard and, on February 27, the Quebec justice minister did indeed make an official request in this regard in a letter to his federal counterpart.

How could the minister say yesterday that he had not received an official request from the Quebec minister of justice in this regard? Is the minister telling tales, or does he not know what is going on?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker, I was in error.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Rock: Mr. Speaker, the record will have to show for the first time, as my hon. friends know, I was in error. The fact is I did receive a letter from the minister in Quebec. He made that request. I have been reminded that legislation has been passed and a request has been made to change the Criminal Code.

I have also learned that consultations with the cruise ship industry have begun. Shortly we will be consulting with the provinces and territories and other interested parties. In view of the hon. member's interest in this subject I will see to it that he is kept abreast of those consultations.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister must probably remember that his colleague in industry wrote him in 1994 recommending an amendment to the Criminal Code to permit the opening of casinos.

Oral Questions

I am sure he remembers now. There was a letter to this effect, and we have a copy.

Given that a number of jobs are at stake in the greater Quebec City region and that there is a consensus, when will the minister act?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is much interest in this subject not only from the minister of the Government of Quebec but also members of my caucus have raised it with me from time to time in connection with cruise ships on other waterways in Canada.

It is for that reason discussions have been initiated with the cruise ship industry. It is our intention to consult with provincial governments in various parts of the country where this issue arises. We will look at all four corners of the issue and determine whether it is in the public interest to bring forward changes to the Criminal Code.

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INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure program was supposed to pave roads, build bridges and improve sewer systems. Instead \$700 million was spent on cultural and recreational facilities. Taxpayers built ski resorts and golf courses while potholes expanded, bridges crumbled and sewers leaked.

• (1440)

The Liberals campaigned on the promise of jobs, jobs, jobs for all Canadians. At first they said 100,000 new jobs, then they said 100,000 new temporary jobs and then they said just 100,000 temporary jobs most of which we already have.

My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Since unemployment is back to 10 per cent and the infrastructure program has achieved so little, will the minister guarantee that there will be no infrastructure sequel, a program that has ended up costing so much for so little?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure project has met with a series of successes. The auditor general mentioned some of them in his report.

When we are spending \$6 billion on thousands and thousands of projects, it is inevitable that some projects will have been badly chosen and some of the management may have been wrong. Compared to the private sector, I am sure that the government did well. That will be seen if one asks any municipality in the country.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we know the golf course did well but we cannot all get on to the same golf course. That is the problem. All Canadians need to benefit from government programs. A tax cut would have been a much better long term solution. A tax cut would have put money in the hands of every Canadian rather than in the hands of a few golfers and a few skiers. We need a fresh start.

If the President of the Treasury Board wants real jobs, well-producing, tax paying and family enhancing jobs, which are what Canadians also want, will he admit that a tax cut would have been far better than any infrastructure program, past, present or future?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker. The reason is that all these infrastructure projects were there to create construction jobs at a time when the rate of unemployment in that field was close to 20 per cent.

I also have a list which indicates that in the riding of St. Albert, which happens to be the riding of the member, 41 projects have been implemented, over \$20 million has been spent and 350 jobs have been created. Will the hon. member now tell me that it was not worth our while to create these jobs in his riding?

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the coalition for the respect of human rights condemned abuse by Immigration officers of Algerian nationals seeking refugee status, including excessively long detentions, intimidation, harassment and other arbitrary practices. The Bloc Québécois has already sharply criticized these actions.

When will the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration put an end to the kind of practices and abuse unworthy of a democratic country that are committed by her officers when dealing with Algerian nationals seeking asylum?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I noticed the coalition held a press conference yesterday, which was attended by the hon. member for Bourassa. I read the summaries in the papers, but unfortunately, the coalition did not advise the minister, and has yet to advise the minister directly of these very serious allegations about the behaviour of certain immigration officers.

I would urge everyone, including the hon. member for Bourassa who joined this group, to communicate to the minister any details of the very serious allegations being made against the staff of the Department of Immigration.

Oral Questions

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has on several occasions advised the minister of this behaviour.

• (1445)

The president of the world antifascist league, who lives in her riding, called before the conference to let her staff know they were going to have this press conference.

It is pretty obvious that in Algeria we are seeing what all intents and purposes is a civil war. That being said, will the minister respond positively to repeated requests from the Bloc Québécois to suspend the deportation of Algerian nationals?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after this press conference, I asked department officials to meet the coalition in order to obtain further details of their very serious allegations. If these allegations are founded, we will act accordingly.

As for sending people back to Algeria, each case is carefully examined before a decision is made.

* * *

OC TRANSP

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour.

Despite efforts by the department or department officials in recent days, a strike has been unavoidable. The public transit strike in Ottawa-Carleton has been raging for two days now.

I would like to know what avenues are open to the government and which of these avenues the government intends to follow to promote a settlement of this dispute and a resumption of services to the community.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Labour and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mediation sessions resumed last night and continued through the night and into today as well.

The best collective agreement is a negotiated one. I encourage the parties to use the services of the mediator they asked me to appoint and whom I appointed immediately last week. I hope that negotiations will continue and that the dispute will be resolved as soon as possible.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, so much for surprising anybody.

Repeatedly the Minister of Finance has stood in this place and said that he has not increased personal income taxes but that is not

what the accountants at Peat Marwick are saying. The accountants at Peat Marwick are saying that since 1988, people with an income of \$35,000 have had a personal income tax hike of \$735.

Will the minister admit that Canadians have suffered a personal income tax hike each and every year that the government has been in power due to the government's decision to continue the deindexation of income tax?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know it has been so wonderful having us in office that it seems like we have been here a lot longer but we have only been in office since 1993. In fact, the inflation creep to which the hon. member refers was put in place by the previous government in 1985.

If we look at the increase in revenues anticipated between 1993-94 when we took office and 1997-98 of some \$23 billion, \$17 billion of that is due to increased economic activity. Over \$2.2 billion is due to the closing of loopholes, the vast majority of which the hon. member and his party would like to see stay in place, but we closed them.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we get after this tax creep. Enough of the weasel words—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: My colleagues, this House is starting to get a little bit creepy. I would ask the hon. member to please put his question.

• (1450)

Mr. Solberg: Unlike the finance minister, Reform recognizes the unfairness of this inflation tax. That is why we have decided to increase the basic personal exemption to \$7,900. It would make up for this back door tax hike.

Will the finance minister admit in the face of all the evidence that the government has indeed raised taxes every year since it has been in power? Will he continue to push for the deindexation of income tax, a decision that will cost taxpayers hundreds of dollars a year in new taxes?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest the hon. member go back and look at what Reformers suggested. The main focus of their tax reduction was the elimination of the higher income surtax. It had nothing to do with helping people at the lower end of the income scale.

What Reformers are really talking about is a massive tax increase to be imposed by the provinces. They would eliminate equalization payments in Saskatchewan and in Nova Scotia. They would increase health care costs by cutting three and a half to four billion dollars out of the Canada health and social transfer. What they would really do is bring in a short term tax decrease now which would impose a massive tax increase on the next generation, and that is simply immoral.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***KREVER COMMISSION**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice seems to have his memory back today, but the same can certainly not be said of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice told us that there was a way the Krever commission could have access to the documents it is requesting for the 1980-84 period. What the Minister of Justice told us yesterday is that the Privy Council, on the one hand, was not bound by section 39 to prevent the release of the documents in question and that, on the other hand, it had to obtain the consent of then Prime Ministers Pierre Trudeau and John Turner.

I therefore ask the Minister of Justice, who seems to know about these matters, if he stands by his statement and if indeed the Krever commission could gain access to these documents, should the government take the action he suggested yesterday by not applying section 39 and asking Pierre Elliott Trudeau and John Turner for their consent.

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are both right. The section in the evidence act quite clearly provides that documents including cabinet documents are subject to privilege. They are secret. The custodian of those documents is the Clerk of the Privy Council.

The only way those documents can be released, and this has happened on rare occasions in the past, is with the agreement of the former prime ministers and the current government. The former prime ministers are former Prime Minister Mulroney and former Prime Minister Trudeau. The procedure requires the consent of those former prime ministers before any disclosure can be made. That process is in the hands of the Clerk of the Privy Council.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not a memory problem. He just said so. Therefore, the Deputy Prime Minister must have heard what the Minister of Justice said.

Is it the government's intention to ask for the consent of former Prime Ministers Brian Mulroney, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and John Turner to release these documents, so that the Krever commission can proceed with its work and bring justice to the victims who received tainted blood? Will the government stand up and ask the former Prime Ministers to do the same?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I said, and the

Minister of Justice said the same thing, is that there is a section in the Evidence Act, section 39, that prevents this government from disclosing confidences entrusted with previous governments.

That said, the Prime Minister did state in this House last week that he would do everything he could to shed light on this whole issue. It is clear that the only time anything like this happened was after criminal charges were brought against a minister of the crown.

The matter is already in the hands of Privy Council Clerk Jocelyne Bourgon. She is looking into the possibility of following this procedure in the absence of criminal charges.

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● (1455)

*[English]***CANDU REACTORS**

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

The minister wants Canadians to believe he stands for protecting the environment but Canadians are rather concerned with the sale of the Candu reactors to China because no environmental assessment has been done. It even looks like the government is going to get sued on this point.

Can the minister explain why a project of this nature that is funded by the government and is carried out by federal authority does not need a federal environmental assessment?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question was answered previously by the Minister for International Trade.

To further elaborate for the hon. member, I would like to point out that the sale of the Candu reactors is being financed by crown corporations outside Canada. We have no intention under those rules, under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, to require that the Canadian rules be applied in other countries.

We know that the Candu itself is a safe reactor. It has been tested in our own concerns. China itself has signed all of the proper international safeguards and has done its own assessment. When we sell abroad we abide by the rules abroad. That is the basis by which we recognize the whole question of extraterritoriality. We do not want to apply that to other countries.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, on November 7 the environment minister tabled orders in council for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act so federal projects outside Canada are subject to an environmental review, except crown corporations, despite a Liberal promise to promote sustainable development throughout the world.

Oral Questions

Will the minister explain why he purposely did not go the distance to table the necessary regulations to make crown corporations like Atomic Energy of Canada subject to environmental assessments?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing like the enthusiasm of newfound converts. I recall quite distinctly not so long ago that the member along with all members of his party voted against the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Now he is claiming it as being sacred and sacrosanct. They cannot have it both ways.

I would point out for the member's education and edification that under the new regulations there are requirements for screening to take place for outside projects that can be triggered by the minister responsible. We are ensuring that there is a process in place.

The hon. member might want to go back to his own members with the same enthusiasm to support proper Canadian Environmental Assessment Act procedures in Canada.

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TAXATION

Mrs. Anna Terrana (Vancouver East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Last week the minister announced changes to the Income Tax Act to prevent the use of certain tax shelters. These shelters have been used by the foreign film industry in British Columbia to raise funds for productions in my province.

Did the minister take into account the adverse effects these changes will have on the film industry in B.C.?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): The answer to the question is yes, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly do understand the interest and the concern of the hon. member in posing this question. Foreign films are produced in Canada for a variety of reasons including the expertise and efficiency of Canadian production crews and more favourable production costs.

The changes we have brought about obviously do not change these fundamental factors. They simply make sure that those applying for the shelters match their expenses with their revenues. As the hon. member understands, these tax incentives are for public policy purposes and what we want to do is make sure that there is no leakage.

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[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The measures in the employment insurance reform that will have the most serious impact on the unemployed are going to be implemented in early January. However, not only are the regulations required to implement the act not ready, but there is also every indication that employment centre personnel, officers and managers will not get any training or guidelines before the act comes into effect.

Could the minister tell us when the regulations required to implement the new part of the employment insurance legislation will be ready and available?

• (1500)

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently looked at this issue and I thank the hon. member for Mercier for her interest in it. I looked, among other things, at some interpretation documents concerning the act that will ensure everyone can properly inform beneficiaries in the coming weeks, since we are, of course, perfectly aware of the importance of the new interpretation.

These documents are being prepared. They are already circulating in a number of employment centres.

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[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we now know that there is a procedure under the Canada Evidence Act to get at these secret documents that the government is hiding. In fact, a prominent Osgoode law professor, Peter W. Hogg, says: "It is a matter of a competing balance of public interest". The public interest in this case is the health of blood infected Canadians; the government interest, secrecy on bad decisions.

Which minister will stand up today to defend government secrecy over public safety?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand why the member would extrapolate that I have any interest whatsoever in protecting Brian Mulroney.

* * *

DRUG PATENTS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hate to add to the troubles of the Minister of Health, whose reputation as a progressive Liberal is already under a cloud of smoke.

I want to ask the Minister of Health whether he expects, or is working on the Minister of Finance in order to obtain, or whatever may be the case in Liberal circles, in order that another Liberal promise might be kept. Seventy-four per cent of Canadians would like them to keep the promise to do something about reducing the patent protection of drugs in order to bring down the cost of drugs

Government Orders

and save our health care system. That was a Liberal promise. It is one of the problems with our health care system. When is the Minister of Health going to act on that?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will be aware that the Patent Act comes under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Industry.

The hon. member should be aware that under the provisions of the Patent Act and particularly the Patented Medicines Review Board the companies which are responsible thereto have lived up to their commitments in terms of keeping the price below the CPI. They have also lived up to their commitments with regard to the moneys they had earmarked for the purposes of research in this country. So on those two points they have lived up to their commitments.

However, the hon. member is correct that drug pricing in this country is all too high in many jurisdictions and I hope that we can co-operate with the provinces, including the province of Saskatchewan, where they might delegate the powers to the Patented Medicines Review Board so that we might have a full study of pricing both for generic and brand names in this country.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw to members' attention the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Lorne Calvert, Minister of Social Services and Minister responsible for Seniors from the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1505)

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: We are on debate and the hon. member for Fraser Valley East has the floor. According to our records, he has

approximately seven minutes left and five minutes questions and comments.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when we broke for question period—the aptly named question period, not answer period, because of course, as usual, there were no answers—I was in the middle of explaining to the government side exactly what was wrong with the democratic system as we have it today.

We are debating something today that deals with Parliament, referendums and elections. However, whenever one talks referendum to these Liberal government members, their eyes just roll back in their heads, they take another rum toddy and go to sleep. They do not want to talk about referendums. Referendums are somehow poisonous and anathema to this group but I do not know why.

When we talk about electoral reforms along the notion of the private member's bill by the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster which concerns fixed election dates, the Liberals' eyes roll back in their heads. I do not know what they fear. Maybe they fear that some sort of tremor might run through the electorate, that they would actually know when to plan for an election and they will not consider it.

We talk about things like the process we have come through to get to this stage today, where we are talking about an elections act that should have been brought about with consensus building and co-operation of all parties, opposition and government side, and by taking ample time to consult Canadians. Instead we find a government that has had Mr. Kingsley's report since April and instead of bringing it to Parliament or bringing it to committee we find it is invoking time allocation so that we are not allowed to debate it.

Not only that, but it is being pushed through with such haste that today the government is back again asking for unanimous consent to amend what we passed yesterday because there is not enough time to get it into the regular process for the amendments to even be debated in the House.

What a sad sack way of trying to bring all-party consensus and all-party co-operation to a bill. Ram it through, ask for amendments after the fact, limit debate, do not let parliamentarians talk about it and do not even let Canadians comment on it through the committee or the parliamentary system. That is a shame.

As has been noted earlier, there have been some improvements to this bill in the amendments. We asked for a 30 day cooling off period before a byelection can be held and we got 11 days. I guess that is something. It is 11 more than what was in the original bill.

The other part of this bill that we have trouble with, the part that is again not acceptable and was not even part of the original bill, has to do with the staggered voting hours. The government feels somehow that by getting British Columbians to finish their voting by 7 p.m. that will solve the feeling in B.C. of western alienation.

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• (1510)

As usual, the government thinks that as long as we keep everything the same for Quebec and Ontario voters and adjust the schedule of the voters in Atlantic Canada and the west that everything is fair. I guess it is fair to the government, but it does not address the real issue, which is fair voting hours. We put forward several proposals with respect to that issue, none of which is in the bill. They were not even in private member's Bill C-307, standing in the name of the hon. member for Vancouver East. I do not know from where this concoction came. I guess it came from Manila in a long distance phone call. It is a lousy way to put together a bill.

If some of the greater questions of parliamentary reform, elections reform, the funding of political parties, the timing of elections and the timing of byelections so that people are not left unrepresented had been addressed in a serious way it would have been much easier to support the bill.

There are some measures of the bill which we like. A permanent voters list is a good idea. If the government had listened to our amendment and put it off until August instead of April, it could have saved tens of millions of dollars. Instead the list must be completed by April, which means an extra enumeration, out of sync, which will cost much more money. That is too bad.

If the government had listened to our byelection proposals it would have been much fairer to opposition parties and to the people in those ridings who would have had to wait a maximum of six months before their next member of Parliament was elected to represent them.

If the government had listened in times past to our calls for a fixed election date so that no advantage is given to the party which forms the government, again, that would have had huge grassroots support. Instead we have a bill which is like a halfway step across a chasm. It looks good but it is too bad that the government did not grab this opportunity, which may be its last before the next election, to address some of the serious problems which Canadians want addressed in the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member for Fraser Valley East with great interest. I know he thinks carefully about the future of Canada and that the future of Canada is very close to his heart.

I have sat on this side of the House, surrounded by members of the Bloc Québécois, for nearly a year and I have come to realize that many of the members of the Bloc Québécois are not exactly separatists but are better described as sovereignists. Their vision of the future for Canada is with the provinces having independent powers, short of a shared passport and a shared currency. They

want the central government to be reduced to the point where it is as weak as possible relative to the provincial governments.

I would ask the member for Fraser Valley East what is the difference between his vision of Canada and the sovereignist vision of the Bloc Québécois. Is it not true that the Reform Party wants to diminish the role of Ottawa in the daily life of Canadians and make the provinces all powerful? The provinces could be like British Columbia, which has a new NDP government that did not tell the truth. It does not necessarily follow that we can be guaranteed as Canadians that provincial governments always will be the better form of government in this country.

What is the difference between his position as a Reformer, insisting that Ottawa be diminished as much as possible, to nothing more than an institution that looks after trade and passports, giving all the power to the provinces, and that of the Bloc Québécois? What is the difference between Mr. Manning and Mr. Bouchard, if I may ask?

The Speaker: The hon. member said "Mr. Manning". I presume this is the man who sits in our House and is the leader of the Reform Party.

• (1515)

Mr. Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I suppose I have three or four minutes to answer this question. I could go on for 35 minutes about the differences between Mr. Bouchard and the leader of the third party.

I could go on for the same length of time about the similarities or some of the similar aims of the Liberal Party and the separatist party. I could talk about the way they want to carve Canada into two separate blocs. We are going to have the distinct society of Quebec and then the rest.

I could talk about the fact that when it comes to the welfare system in British Columbia there is a residency requirement. The Liberal government levied a \$30 million fine. The Quebec government has a different standard for tuition for university students outside of their province and what does the Liberal government say? Oh well, Quebecers will be Quebecers. We must live with it. In other words, the Liberals seem to think it is okay to treat Quebec separately and different, give them some kind of special treatment, but that is not the big issue.

What is the big issue? If the answer to keeping Canada together is to spend a lot, intrude into provincial territory and force programs on the provincial governments whether they like it or not, or if the answer is to treat one province differently than the other, or when a crisis comes throw money at it, for example Bombardier, but we will not worry about Canadian Airlines, then I suppose Canada would be a unified country that is solidly together and looking to Ottawa for great leadership.

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What has happened over the last 25 years? We have a \$600 billion debt. We have an intrusive federal government. We cannot now even get agreement on a national day care plan. Why? Because no province trusts the federal government any more. They say the federal government will start the program, yank the funding and they will be left holding the bag.

Now the provinces do not trust the federal government because it is not able to carry through with its financing, because it will not carry through with its promises to the point where the provinces, not just Quebec, but all the provinces are saying if this is federalism, if this is the answer then why on earth should they keep throwing money at Ottawa?

The Reform's vision of Canada is of a country which restricts its role in certain areas. Would it not be great for the federal government to do eight or ten functions really well? Would it not be great to have unanimity among the provinces and the Canadian public to say: "Do you think you should have an overriding role for the environment?" Yes, because environmental concerns cross provincial borders.

I would rather leave the promotion of culture to the Quebecois or the people in British Columbia as they see fit. The minister of culture here does not even know what culture is. If you ask her to define culture she does not even know what Canadian culture is.

What the hon. member is saying about separatism of course is nonsense. The way to hold the country together is to do fewer things, do them well, pay your way, do not ask your grandchildren to pay your debts and keep the country together by doing the necessary things well rather than doing many things poorly.

The Speaker: Will the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park be speaking 20 minutes or will he be sharing his time with another member?

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I shall be sharing my time with the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

I shall keep my remarks brief because two parliamentary standing committees are waiting for my presence there also.

I am pleased that I have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act. This bill is greatly needed as it modernizes and improves the efficiency of our electoral administration. I am very pleased that this bill has been brought forward as I have believed for quite some time that it was necessary because of our inefficient enumeration process.

During every election we hear horror stories of residents of entire streets and whole apartment buildings not being enumerated.

Many voters are omitted because they are travelling or working odd shifts during the enumeration period. Yet other voters are not enumerated because of language barriers or because they simply do not want to open their doors due to security concerns. It is sad but many people are afraid to open their doors when they are knocked on late in the evening. As a result they do not get enumerated. Others do not discover the omission of their names until they arrive at the polls on election day.

• (1520)

That is why on December 13, 1988, after the election, I urged Parliament to approve the following recommendations: first, to develop a registration process to establish permanent voters lists; second, to approve election day voter's registration in urban areas, the same right that is given to rural voters. Implementation of the latter recommendation has prevented discrimination against urban voters and guarantees Canadian voters their citizenship rights. It is our duty as parliamentarians to make it easier for citizens to vote, not to place obstacles in their way. Bill C-63 does just that.

I am pleased to see that through Bill C-63 a permanent voters register will be created. That will solve many of the problems I mentioned. The bill will pave the way to a 1997 election campaign based on 36 days as opposed to the current 47 days. This is an excellent move for it will save the federal government and the Canadian taxpayers a sum of \$30 million per federal election.

The shortened election period will generate approximately \$8 million of the \$30 million savings to the Canadian taxpayers for each federal election. By having the permanent register with a shortened election period we can expect significant cost savings. Another benefit that results from this bill is that the permanent register can be shared with provinces, municipalities and school boards for their elections which would generate even more savings for Canadians.

Sharing and pooling resources makes a lot of sense. The permanent register of voters will be updated using data from Revenue Canada, lists of new Canadian citizens from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and from provincial and territorial motor vehicle and vital statistics data.

It is worth noting, as the bill states, that the register will be established from information collected by enumeration, but will be held outside the electoral period. Between electoral events these lists will be updated. No longer will Canadians be left off voters lists because of the short enumeration period and the obstacles I described earlier.

Bill C-63 is very convenient. When an election is called the preliminary lists will be distributed within five days of the issuing of the writs. Election expense limits will be available 31 days before polling day as opposed to the 24 days under the current

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legislation. This will allow the candidate to assess earlier what his or her expense limits are.

The objects of Bill C-63 and the amendments are very clear: to make our electoral administration more practical and efficient. As someone who has campaigned as a Liberal candidate in five elections, winning four and losing one, I applaud the government for this bill and I am certain that Canadians will support it as well. I am pleased we will have good support from the opposition parties on this bill.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the wise and tested comments of the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park. I recall one of his first campaigns when I was barely in high school. Of course he was successful. As he indicated, he has seen many elections in the past.

Could the hon. member provide a few other illustrations of how he believes a permanent voters' list might be able to assist us in not only realizing economies of scale as far as the federal and provincial governments working together but also in confirming at least for the voters that they can make their minds up in 37 days? They do not need 47 days. Perhaps the hon. member would like to provide some greater wisdom to the House of Commons of his own experiences, notwithstanding, of course, yours, Mr. Speaker.

• (1525)

Mr. Flis: I appreciate that question. My advice to Canadians would be that the day they become old enough to vote is the day to start taking an interest in the established parties. I advise young students who reach voting age that they do not have to vote for me because I am running as the Liberal candidate. My advice is to study all the parties and get involved, join the local association, be it the Parkdale—High Park association, be it the Conservative association, the New Democratic Party association, the Green Party, or the Reform Party. They should get involved early, study what each party stands for and then see if the ideology, the philosophy, the vision of that party meets what their vision is for Canada.

The people sitting in the House do not put all of this energy into getting elected for ourselves. We are building a future country for our children, their children, their grandchildren and so on. It is people like former Prime Minister Laurier who had such visions, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson who had such visions. Our present Prime Minister has such a vision for the future of Canada. This is why he is travelling abroad as Team Canada.

I advise the young people not to wait for the writ to be called, and not to wait to be enumerated. They should have their minds already made up. Then when the writ is called, I think that is when they should attend all candidates meetings. That is where they can study the literature.

I do not think they need more than a month to decide, to be able to say that yes, that is the party, that is the candidate that they are going to vote for.

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to support Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. The bottom line is that this legislation is good news for taxpayers. It is good news because it will make election campaigns shorter and simpler and it will save Canadians money.

The purpose of this legislation is to establish a permanent voters' list. This list will be used for federal general elections, byelections, referendums, municipal and provincial elections, even school board elections and will eliminate the need for door to door enumeration.

Above all, it reduces overlap and duplication. For many years there has been considerable interest and support for the idea of a permanent voters' list. Indeed, a great deal of research has gone into determining the best system to bring Canada in line with other Commonwealth countries.

As Patrick Boyer writes in "Election Law in Canada," no other country has a system where the lists of voters are prepared afresh on a systematic basis and so close to the time of voting as does Canada. While it is true that our current system produces extremely accurate voters' lists it is also the most expensive component of the election process.

There would be one last enumeration done in the spring of 1997. Currently in most provinces all three levels of government spend resources compiling their own voters' lists. This results in considerable duplication and expense. In these times of economic responsibility and fiscal restraint all levels of government must learn to work together on behalf of the Canadian taxpayer and there is only one. We must produce legislation and policies that are both cost efficient and effective.

That is what Bill C-63 is all about. It is in the spirit of restraint and responsibility that election officials from across the country have expressed a willingness to explore options and possibilities for establishing this permanent and shared voters' list. The province of British Columbia has successfully employed a permanent and shared voters' list since 1946 and several other provinces are currently working on establishing similar registers of data.

• (1530)

Establishing a permanent voters list will reduce the cost of an election by eliminating door to door enumeration and also by shortening the time of the election campaign. Door to door enumeration is the single largest cost of an electoral event. It is extremely labour intensive and must be completed within a very demanding short time frame. In addition, the public is often

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inconvenienced by enumeration, particularly when the same information is being sought by several levels of government.

The realities of the 1990s dictate that fewer people are at home during the daytime, forcing enumerators to make their rounds in the evening. Given that much of this work is done on foot, this raises security concerns for enumerators and makes residents more reluctant to participate. A permanent voters list would also help to ensure the inclusion of people who are not at home during the enumeration period and on election day.

While some concerns have been raised that a permanent voters register would eliminate thousands of jobs for enumerators at election time, it is important to realize that other more permanent jobs would be created at the registry offices across the country.

Concerns have also been voiced about the privacy and confidentiality of the list and the information it will contain. Canadians need not worry. The permanent register will only contain the elector's name, mailing address, municipal address, electoral district, gender and date of birth, all of which will be updated using existing federal and provincial data sources. There will be legislative and administrative safeguards to guarantee that the list can only be used for electoral purposes. In addition, individuals with privacy concerns will be able to opt out of the permanent list.

The most important advantage of a permanent voters list is undeniably the money it will save Canadian taxpayers. Indeed, the projected cost savings to the federal government will total \$30 million per electoral event by eliminating the need for door to door enumeration.

Bill C-63 will also allow the election period to be shortened from 47 days to a more efficient time of 36 days. A shorter campaign will still allow voters an opportunity to get to know the candidates and their policies. At the same time, it will eliminate time for campaign rhetoric. How often have we heard the public say enough is enough, get on with the vote. Candidates will have to be effective and efficient in their use of campaign time which is exactly how it should be. The shorter campaign period will save the government and taxpayers an additional \$8 million per election.

There is widespread support for this initiative across the country. In fact, a survey conducted by Elections Canada in 1996 found that over 90 per cent of Canadians responded and supported the idea of a permanent register. Representatives from three recognized parties in this House have indicated their support in principle for Bill C-63.

While our current method of enumeration is highly accurate, the cost of the system in terms of financial and human resources is too high to be maintained. That is why this government is looking ahead and planning for the future of the democratic process. Now is

the time to implement a more effective and more efficient system, one that is keeping pace with technology and with other Commonwealth countries and one that will save taxpayers almost \$40 million in the next election alone.

For these reasons, I urge all hon. members in this House to join with me in supporting Bill C-63 and supporting these cost saving and efficient measures that will guarantee engendering taxpayers' support in the democratic process.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to my colleague across the way that, after all she has said about this bill, I think she has left out the most important part. For us, the most important part is the funding of political parties. The bill is silent on this topic. You have, of course, been aware of the Bloc Québécois's position from the beginning.

• (1535)

The Bloc Québécois has always fiercely defended the principle by which political parties must get their funding from individual contributions. The bill before us today does not spell this out.

In addition, the political funding of the Bloc Québécois is not determined by this legislation, but by the legislation governing political parties in Quebec. Accordingly, funding may come only from voters, the only ones entitled to make political contributions.

Thus, having established this principle, we are not at the mercy of organizations and corporations that could, by making very large contributions to campaign funds, blackmail, as it were, those holding power.

I would like to ask my colleague why she did not make the point to her caucus that her party should add a funding policy to the Canada Elections Act that would limit contributions to voters alone?

[English]

Mrs. Brushett: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question of the hon. Bloc Québécois member.

It is a very interesting topic of discussion, as to who should contribute or could contribute to the democratic process and what kind of credit they should receive. Under the current system it is a tax credit which goes to any individual. By no means would we obstruct anyone from donating to the political process, to the democratic process of this country.

We take pride in having one of the freest and greatest democratic countries in the world. That is evident by the fact that we have a separatist opposition party requesting a change today. There is probably not another country in the world which would have as its

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official opposition a separatist party attempting to pull the country apart.

I feel confident that the Canadian taxpayers choose freely how, when and who might give to the political process through the credit taxation system.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the member took great pains to stress the money which would be saved by this bill and I am sure we are all very happy about that.

There is also a new technology which would enable us to save a lot of money and there was no mention of it in the bill. That is the use of electronic touch-tone voting. Introducing that technology or making it possible for Elections Canada to do it would make it very convenient for the elderly, the disabled and other people who might have difficulty getting to the polls. It would also potentially save enormous amounts of money.

Even though it is not in the bill, would the member indicate if she would support Elections Canada moving toward electronic voting as one method of voting?

Mrs. Brushett: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of the Reform Party brings up a very valid and important point.

The province of Nova Scotia used electronic voting in a leadership campaign a few years ago. That was one of the times it was used and it was very successful when the technology was initiated. It is something we could look at.

This is the first step in electoral reform in the elections act. It is the beginning step. I am sure with technology improvements and the rapid pace of change that we will be forward looking in addressing any amendments which might be brought forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will share my speaking time with the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Amending the Canada Elections Act is an exercise which, in my opinion, should be taken seriously. It means the entire legislation should be reviewed. It is not a matter of adding a few things here and there which do nothing to improve the legislation.

I noticed that members opposite did not consider this legislation to be very important. The only thing that seems important to them is to pass this bill as quickly as possible, to rush it through Parliament.

• (1540)

The Canadian public wants electoral legislation that is clear and transparent. The public has the right to be well informed. However, the government does not seem willing to pass legislation that would guarantee Canadians the dice are not loaded.

This bill has certain weaknesses. It completely overlooks the fact that campaign spending should be strictly controlled. By keeping spending to a minimum, more citizens will be given a chance to express their views in a given party. Everyone will be on the same footing. There will be a level playing field. Consider Quebec's legislation on political party financing, adopted by the Lévesque government in 1977. I truly believe that since that time, and this has been proven, the public is satisfied with the situation. Quebec legislation provides that only individual voters may help finance political parties.

The Canadian legislation, including the bill before us today, is far more flexible. Businesses and unions have the right to finance political parties. Now seriously, has anyone ever seen a business or a company vote? Never.

Another question that comes to mind is this: Why were companies and businesses given the right to finance a political party? The answer is obvious. These companies and businesses use their contributions to try and influence the government.

If a business gives several thousand dollars to a political party and this party forms the government, the business can expect the government to return the favour. These are the businesses where the government will find its friends, and often, these friends are appointed to positions in various commissions.

In other words, the present way political parties are financed encourages lobbying. When we say lobbying, we are getting pretty close to nepotism and patronage. Legislation that is clear should emphasize the fact that only voters have the right to finance political parties.

What about these big fundraising dinners? In 1993, a few days before the election, there were banquets at \$1,000 and \$3,000 per plate.

• (1545)

Who in Canada can afford such an expense, except the well-to-do, who arrange for their company to pick up the tab. I think, therefore, that a bill like the one before us must restrict the funding of political parties to voters. It must reflect democracy, and thus equal opportunities for all. In this bill, democracy takes a beating.

Next, the bill proposes a permanent register of electors. I do not think this is a bad idea, except that all the necessary information has to be provided in order to further democracy. The list must ensure that elections personnel are able to identify voters. If they cannot, we could face problems that might topple power on one side or the other.

For example, if the list does not include the date of birth, a person of dubious intentions could represent himself as another individual and deny that person the right to vote. The date of birth is essential to the permanent list. It is vital in helping electoral personnel identify people more easily. In the old days, we used to

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talk about floating voters, where, for example, people would vote using the names of the dead. We have to take every precaution to avoid taking a step backwards.

Another factor involves registering a person's gender. It may not appear necessary to everyone, but I consider it very important. You will understand that in a riding like mine it may be necessary. Just think about the name "Tremblay" in my riding. Add to this first names that are as common for women as they are for men, such as Claude, Dominique, Camille or Michel, and it becomes impossible for returning officers to certify that the person before them is indeed the one whose name is on the list. Nowadays, ill-intentioned people can still do aggravating things to voters. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account all these details when making up a permanent voters list.

I agree that the current act must be amended, but not in haste as the government seems intent on doing. An election act affects all citizens, regardless of who they are. Will the government have time, before the next election, to properly inform all voters about this permanent list?

• (1550)

If the bill before us is passed, it should not apply to the next election. Why? Because voters need to know their rights.

Another issue which is not dealt with in the bill is the possibility of legislating a set date for an election. I can tell you that such a measure would save a lot of money and speculation.

In the United States, for example, everyone knows what to expect. In Canada, it is still not the case. Two and half years into a mandate, people already start wondering whether an election will be held in the fall or the spring. And so on.

A lot of energy could instead be devoted to reviewing many bills that we currently do not have time to look at. This period is viewed much more as a pre-election time.

The Speaker: My dear colleague, I am sorry, but your 10 minutes are up. I now recognize the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I can understand that, with the upcoming changes to the electoral map, which will mean that the Témiscouata polling division will shift to the riding of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, you might get a bit turned around, but no matter, because it will be the same person here after the next election.

I had a question for my hon. colleague, one I have been asking myself ever since I came here. On a number of occasions, the Bloc Québécois has come back to the issue of funding of political parties. Being 43 years old and having been raised in the political

culture established by René Lévesque, according to which the funding of political parties in Quebec is based on contributions from individuals rather than corporations, I have the impression that this argument, in democratic terms, is very convincing in and of itself and does not require further explanations.

I would like to know whether my colleague thinks that it is because of a lack of courage that the present government has failed to address this in the bill, because it would have been impossible to break the vicious circle by which, when a company has contributed \$50,000, it then influences the way in which political parties are funded, and by influencing political parties, companies can keep making \$50,000 contributions.

Is it because the present government lacked the courage to change this state of affairs, or is it also because of a certain ignorance of political culture, of the positive effects that could arise from such a reform?

I would like to know whether my colleague thinks it is for one of these two reasons, or for another reason altogether that he thinks would help us understand better why the government is reforming the elections act but is closing its eyes to such an important aspect as funding?

Mr. Fillion: Mr. Speaker, in response to my hon. colleague's question, let me say, first of all, as I indicated earlier, that every chance we have had since coming here in 1993, we in the Bloc Québécois have defended funding of political parties as we know it in Quebec.

We have also strongly criticized funding by big business, these large corporations that make huge profits every year and can easily afford to make substantial contributions to the traditional parties such as the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. Any government receiving such funding has no choice but to return the favour at one time or another. For one thing, what this means for democracy is scary.

Will bills introduced in the House under these circumstances truly reflect the wishes of the people or those of the lobbyists and financial backers? That is the first part of my answer.

• (1555)

Now, as to whether the people opposite had enough courage or not, I have to say that they lacked courage in introducing this bill. For once, funding of political parties could have been put in the hands of those who should have it, the voters, with a cap on contributions.

Our colleagues across the way missed a golden opportunity to give power and opportunity, equal power and opportunity to all. At present, there is disparity. Some political parties are immensely rich because big business keeps pouring money into their coffers, while the others get the crumbs. This necessarily has an effect on

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the debates. All parties are not on an equal footing, there are strings attached. They certainly lacked political courage in this matter.

There is still time to take corrective action. They could do it right now. But they will argue that, traditionally, nothing new is added at third reading stage, that we should either pass or defeat what we have before us.

The strength of the Parti Québécois is in public funding. You can be sure of one thing: we will get re-elected in the next election and we will have public funding to thank for that.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate at third reading on Bill C-63, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act, which includes interesting things, such as a computerized file and other significant technical changes.

On the other hand, as the hon. member pointed out earlier, and I will elaborate on this, the bill is silent on an important issue, namely the financing of political parties. This is something which, under the British democratic system, has evolved very slowly. Quebec uses a very modern system, a system that is almost ahead of its time, compared to what exists in Canada, North America and even elsewhere in the world.

Let me make a comparison for the benefit of voters. Under the Quebec act, only individuals can make financial contributions to political parties, up to a maximum of \$3,000 per party. Companies, unions, organizations or lobby groups cannot give a cheque to the government and thus have an influence they should not have, since they do not vote.

By comparison, the federal legislation allows any corporate entity to help finance political parties. As we know, a number of big businesses, particularly in the banking sector, take full advantage of that provision. Lists of contributions show amounts of money as high as \$30,000, \$50,000 or \$80,000 paid to political parties.

Under the federal legislation, there is no ceiling for such contributions. There is a maximum for income tax purposes, but nothing prevents someone from contributing \$100,000. To give you an example, the New Democratic Party once received \$250,000 from someone. This has a negative impact on democracy.

I think political parties can become somewhat complacent and dependent when not forced to go and meet people like the Bloc Québécois does. We ask people to contribute \$10, \$20 or \$50 to help our party survive. We talk with voters, who give us their views and tell us about their interests and concerns. This is very healthy for the political life of a party.

However, it is not easy. It requires daily and constant efforts. It may not be the favourite part of our work, but it forces us to be in

touch with voters. Therefore, this issue should have been dealt with in the act. The government should have taken this opportunity to do so.

Under the current federal legislation, political parties rely on cocktail parties at \$1,000 a head, on special meetings at \$2,000, \$5,000 or \$10,000, and even on cheques in the amount of \$50,000 or \$80,000 from businesses. Then you know what happens to the legislative process.

• (1600)

Then, when an organization has a point of view to give on a bill being drafted or one already tabled, there is a tendency to listen a little harder when someone has given us \$50,000, for example, or when Canadian banks contribute \$300,000 or \$400,000; there is a chance that the government will be more receptive. The ordinary citizen cannot come up with this sort of money. There is a double standard. Our democracy, which is so well viewed in the world, still has a little way to go.

Earlier, a member of the government party said that Parliament is wonderful because it tolerates a party that she described as separatist, but that I would call sovereignist. I would reply to the member that we are here today primarily because of our funding, which is rooted in Quebec's tradition of looking to individuals for contributions. We set our own constraint, so that, although the federal legislation allowed us to seek funding from companies, unions and organizations, we did not choose that route; we decided to respect the spirit and the letter of the Quebec legislation and to accept contributions from individuals only.

That meant that we certainly had our work cut out for us in the years before the election, but, at the same time, it brought us into contact with voters, with the result that we could be sure that, unlike other platforms, our party's platform reflected what Quebecers wanted. This is the advantage of funding by individuals. This fundamental concern with ensuring contact with the citizen was almost the greatest contribution made by René Lévesque to democracy in Quebec.

I would like to mention various pieces of legislation, because this is the ultimate result. It allows legislators to be much more independent of large corporations, unions and other organizations.

Quebec has passed minimum terms of employment legislation, voluntary retirement and anti-strikebreaking legislation, and legislation banning advertising aimed at children. Is this not the very legislation which, in a system with very powerful lobbies that even go so far as to make financial contributions, would not have been passed by a government with behind the scenes forces at work?

If the children's advertising industry had been able to contribute \$50,000, \$100,00 or \$200,000 in Quebec in order to oppose this bill, do you think we would have succeeded in creating legislation

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as progressive and as generous to the public, while meeting the criteria for equality in our society?

The funding of political parties is an important and significant element in a society's democratic quality of life. It is regrettable that, when the government was revising its Elections Act, it did not take the time to find a solution to this. Perhaps there could have been compromises, but there is certainly material here for a start: a ceiling on campaign contributions could have been set.

The present Liberal government could certainly have stated that \$5,000, or \$10,000 was the maximum that could be accepted. Then, when people come looking for favours, saying "Well, I did give you a hand", the answer is "Yes, you did give a hand, but that helping hand is worth a maximum of \$5,000 or \$10,000. One is not, therefore, required to bend over backwards in response to large donations. That could have made a difference, having a ceiling, but the main element is that only individuals may donate. This makes us independent.

Taking the example of the taxation document tabled by the Bloc Québécois, do you think a political party which had received \$50,000 or \$100,000 from various organizations could have tabled a document of such quality, one acknowledged by the finance minister himself as constructive and positive? No, this was a document based on common sense, on the outcome of the consultations we held.

The official opposition finance critic, among others, came to my riding. Meetings were held with chamber of commerce members. They shared their opinions with us. We included in our proposal the views of the La Pocatière and Rivière-du-Loup chambers of commerce, views which are moderate, interesting and non-partisan and hence could be used. The entire document was drafted without any undue pressure from anyone. On the other hand, banks and labour unions could also make representations.

• (1605)

In the case of Canadian, do we not have a situation that is strongly influenced by political party financing? One wonders whether things would have been different if contributions could only be made by individuals and whether there would not have been an entirely different solution to the future of air transportation from Canada to other countries as opposed to the one we have now, where we have a lame duck that has been barely surviving for the past few years.

Why does the government keep pouring money into this company? What could justify this? It is difficult to find an answer, but I think that if the government had included in the bill a provision to

tighten the rules for political party financing, this would have been a major contribution.

In 10, 15 or 20 years, people would have said that this government brought about major changes in standards of political behaviour and that individual citizens have become more important to their elected representatives because only individuals can finance their activities and influence them in what they do by the quality of their argument, not by the number of dollars in their wallet.

These are important factors which we do not find in the bill, and that is pity. Revising legislation like the Canada Elections Act and the Referendum Act is not a daily occurrence. That is what we are about to do, and a few elements will be in effect for the next election. So at the end of this century and into the next decade, we can expect to live with the present legislation. There are elements that should have been considered regarding financing. These are not in the bill, and it is really too bad and is difficult to accept.

However, I believe we in the Bloc Québécois are known for our tenacity and for the fact that we can open the books at any time and say who contributed to our campaign, and I think the Government of Canada missed a wonderful opportunity to make major changes to improve the situation.

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I have understood what my colleague said, he feels that, in Canada, there are two sorts of contributions under the existing elections act and even with the bill before us. There are political financial contributions and there are ideological financial contributions.

Here is an example. In Canada, in recent years, only about two per cent of the population has contributed reasonable sums to political parties. This may be described as ideological funding. These people give because they believe in the party's program, its intentions and its policy.

On the other hand, always during this time and under the former elections act, new contributions, political financial contributions, were made. For example, 40 per cent of the top 500 companies made contributions, and 35 per cent of the top 155 financial institutions contributed in the same period.

When the bulk of a political party's funding comes from these major financial institutions, and this is my question to my colleague, does their contribution affect objectives, policies and the legislation introduced in this House? Do these people not expect, and this is my other question, some sort of return on the exorbitant amounts they contribute to the traditional federal parties?

Mr. Crête: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I will answer by giving him two examples. The first one I will draw from our political past.

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• (1610)

As you know, in Quebec in the 1960s, the government took over the hydro sector. I suspect that was when Lévesque developed his plan to limit the funding of political parties to that provided by individuals.

A very powerful lobby of private companies opposed government ownership of utilities. These companies were making important contributions to the political parties. They used to send all kinds of money to ministers and members of Parliament and Lévesque was keenly aware of this pressure. His reasoning was that those he spoke with thought government ownership made plain common sense. That was his finding.

Then, he figured there might be a way of reducing the pressure and ensuring that the voters are given as much importance as those who do not have the right to vote. In a democracy, the greater the importance given to the voters at the expense of those who do not have the right to vote, the more significant and interesting it sounds to me.

The other aspects I would like to address is family trusts in the existing system. Take the hypothetical case, in relation to family trusts, where funding by corporations and other organizations did not exist. Would the outcome have been the same if only individual citizens could have funded these trusts? To ask the question is to answer it. That is why this reform is incomplete.

This is an incomplete bill. There is an important element missing. The government overlooked a significant aspect in lacking courage in establishing its political base: the funding of its political activities. The bill does not contain the main thing that is required to ensure the quality of democratic life that suits our needs.

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to support Bill C-63. This is an important stage in the process undertaken two years ago to establish a permanent voters list. Members who took part in this exercise know how necessary it had become to modernize our electoral system.

I would like to briefly point out the four key elements of the bill, for the benefit of those who are not very familiar with the issue.

First, the bill provides for the establishment of a permanent register of electors to replace the door to door census. Second, the electoral period is reduced from 47 to 36 days. Third, one last door to door census outside of an electoral period will be used to make the preliminary list of voters that will be distributed in the five days following the call of the next election. This census will also provide the basic information for the permanent electoral list. Fourth, changes are made to voting hours, so as to put all Canadian electors on the same footing.

The bill will basically allow a more modern and effective management of electoral operations.

[*English*]

I would like to emphasize the considerable work that preceded the introduction of this bill and the high degree of consensus I believe exists around its provisions and the necessity to move on these changes.

Through the work of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, many elements of this bill have been explored. Furthermore, the bill now reflects committee amendments flowing from the diligent work of my colleagues on that same committee.

[*Translation*]

I would like to say a few words on comments made earlier today by the hon. member for Bellechasse, who made a major contribution to the process that led to this bill. I must reject the comments he made, when, to a certain extent, he questioned the credibility of the staff of Canada's chief electoral officer. In my opinion, these people have served well all members from all political parties who took part in the exercise.

• (1615)

[*English*]

I understand that this is the great hall of debate, to debate ideas and to debate values, but I only regret that we have commented today on professional officials, darned good professional officials, who served the committee and this whole process very well. Yes, they were in attendance, and continue to be today, to be consulted by all parliamentarians who have an interest in this process. However, I regret that there was some doubt left as to their integrity. I want to express on behalf of the government our total confidence in those officials, which ultimately reflects our confidence in our entire electoral process. I do not believe we should compromise either their independence or their impartiality.

In addition, our chief electoral officer and his staff have worked on this issue, at times in consultation with provincial counterparts and members of the committee. I believe we now have a bill which meets the needs of Canadians and it should be implemented as soon as possible.

It has been suggested that there has not been enough time to consider this bill. In fact, Elections Canada began working on the register in 1994. Elections Canada apprised the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs several times on its progress, including the feasibility report which was presented in March 1996. This led to more work and the result is the proposal which is before the House today.

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In summary, the register project has moved ahead as quickly as possible while providing time for parliamentary study and debate.

[*Translation*]

If I may, I would first like to provide the House with a few explanations about this bill. As I mentioned earlier, a final enumeration will be carried out nationally, not during an election period.

The procedure used for this enumeration would be the same as the one used after writs are issued. This final enumeration would be beneficial from two points of view.

First, it would make it possible, in anticipation of the next general election, the 36th in our history, to compile a preliminary list of voters, which would be distributed in the five days after the writs are issued. Rapid distribution of this and subsequent lists will make it possible to shorten the electoral period. Canadians quite obviously want a shorter election campaign, for practical as well as economic reasons, but also because it would allow greater inter-governmental co-operation.

Second, this final enumeration would provide an opportunity to collect the data necessary to compile a permanent register of voters. Enumerators will ask voters their full name, address, sex and date of birth, and ask them to confirm that they are indeed 18 years of age and Canadian citizens.

On the question of sex, the government is pleased to support an amendment restricting this information to internal management of the register by Elections Canada. It will not appear on the lists distributed to parties, candidates and provincial administrations, if their legislation requires it.

[*English*]

The permanent register would be compiled through this last door to door enumeration and through the use of the Prince Edward Island and Alberta lists, since these provinces are better positioned to co-operate with Elections Canada. The register would be fully operational for electoral events following the next general election.

What are the benefits of this bill? The register would be maintained and kept election ready by Elections Canada. It would keep the list current by drawing from existing federal and provincial data sources. It is also important to note that the register would generate the preliminary list of electors for an electoral event whose early availability is key to a shortened campaign.

Once the writs are issued there would also be a new and enhanced revision process to ensure that all Canadians have the opportunity to have their names on the voting list.

A permanent register of electors has several advantages. Over time it would provide considerable savings at the federal level by

replacing door to door enumeration with data provided by Revenue Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. We estimate the federal savings at \$30 million for each federal general election. It would also save costs for parties by making it possible to shorten the electoral period to 36 days.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

It has been asked why 36 days was decided on. The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing had recommended a 40 day campaign. Ontario's campaign is 37 days long. Certain countries, such as Great Britain and Australia, also have short campaigns.

The amendment means that federal campaigns, both referendums and general elections, will be 36 days long. We anticipate that provincial and municipal administrations will also want to have access to the federal register. Should this be the case, there will be additional savings to taxpayers, who support the three levels of government after all.

Finally, this register will encourage better federal-provincial co-operation and make it possible to reduce overlap and duplication.

Elections Canada worked with all its provincial counterparts on this project. They are enthusiastically and impatiently waiting to see the final version of this legislation in order to finalize the latest agreements with Elections Canada.

[*English*]

Elections officials in Alberta and Prince Edward Island are right now best positioned to collaborate with Elections Canada in building the first register. The New Brunswick legislature is debating relevant legislation at this time. In other words, the provinces are supportive and eager to see us institute this initiative.

This enthusiasm extends to provincial registrars of motor vehicles and of vital statistics where there are agreements in principle to provide Elections Canada with data once the federal legislation is passed. Allow me to make several points about the bill absolutely clear.

The register of electors would not prevent a citizen from exercising his or her constitutionally protected right to vote. Citizens would not have to have their name on the register to vote. However, they would need to ensure that their name is placed on the voters list either during the electoral campaign or on polling day using procedures already in the law and enhanced by this bill. Also, we believe the register would be as efficient in terms of accuracy as the current system of door to door enumeration.

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[*Translation*]

This bill respects voters' privacy and includes measures aimed at ensuring the confidentiality of personal information.

We insist that the principle of active consent be applied to any information issued by federal sources. This is particularly important for any information transmitted by Revenue Canada. Taxpayers would, in fact, be required to check a box on their tax return indicating their consent to having their name, address and date of birth passed on to Elections Canada.

A similar approach would be used with new Canadians, to ensure that they could exercise their newly acquired right to vote.

The bill also indicates who would be entitled to use this information and states that it is to be used for election purposes only. Any improper use of the information would be subject to strict penalties.

Voters could also write to the chief electoral officer in order to request that their personal information be stricken from the voters' register, or that they continue to be included in the federal listing, without any possibility of the information being passed on to other electoral administrations. Similarly, they could also ask for access to their information and have any errors corrected or changes made.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Once Canadians learn of the advantages of the new system they will want to ensure its success. With some 3.7 million changes each year to the population of eligible voters we need this multifaceted approach to keeping the register current.

On a final clarification, the bill ensures that each vote carries equal weight. We have struck a compromise that is equitable within the geography of a country that majestically spans six time zones. The proposed voting day schedule acknowledges a world of instantaneous communication but ensures that each vote has equal weight, whether cast in the riding of St. John's East, Newfoundland or in Skeena, British Columbia.

In conclusion, members are asked to vote on a bill that reflects work of the past years, modernizes our electoral system, gives each vote equal weight, meets concerns of opposition and government parties and promotes federal-provincial co-operation.

Fundamentally this bill is consistent with our democratic traditions and for that reasons should be implemented as soon as possible.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. whip of the

government. I need a couple of further points of clarification if he might provide them.

Earlier today I asked another member of the government why there appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand the government claims that there is genuine universal support for this legislation, for these changes to the elections act. Yet what we find are quite a number of amendments coming from all directions to this particular piece of legislation.

It would seem to me that if there is support, and if this has been well thought out, indeed if it has reached the point where the government in its infinite wisdom has decided to fast track this and bring forward time allocation to hurry this through the House with very limited debate, it is a piece of legislation that is all encompassing and that certainly is going to do the job with no need for amendment.

That is the first question I have for the hon. whip. There certainly appears to be a contradiction in this piece of legislation.

The second point is he talked long and grand about the confidentiality of the electoral lists once in place. I wish I could say I share his confidence in that this list will be kept confidential. It certainly makes one wonder when a few weeks ago it was revealed that a filing cabinet showed up at some place in Ontario with seven or eight Revenue Canada files belonging to individual Canadians. This is the way the government treats the confidentiality of information.

Given that it is well known that computer software can be hacked into on a regular basis nowadays, I simply do not share the confidence of the hon. member and his government that this particular list will be secure and will be used, as he stated, only for electoral purposes. I wonder if the hon. member could clarify further how he intends to keep the list truly confidential.

If so, why is there a need to identify voters by gender? Could he perhaps touch on that issue as well. There is a real fear among female voters that their addresses and their places of residence will become known and become public knowledge. The gender associated with that obviously is a concern for security purposes.

Mr. Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River for his remarks and his questions.

No, and I hope he is not too shocked or too disappointed, there is not universal support. I think it is quite clear within the halls of this wonderful Chamber today that there are some different views and some opposition, but the bill does meet the test that was set forth a few years ago.

• (1630)

There is a great consensus across the land with regard to elections as to whether they should be shorter. If we have a difference of opinion on whether it should be 40 days or 36 days,

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certainly the bill concretely addresses the matter and I believe it will meet the test of Canadians in terms of length.

I think there is a great deal of consensus also with regard to the other objective which was to establish a permanent register. With due respect to opposing views on certain matters in the bill, I think those two principle objectives have been met in the legislation. Let us not forget this was not drawn in haste. In fact, there has been a great deal of dialogue and a great deal of debate throughout the country over the past few years about this subject matter. I believe that having considered some of the amendments that were put forward what we have arrived at demonstrates the openness which was apparent in the deliberations of this piece of legislation.

I went on the record earlier in committee on the matter of staggered hours. In a country like ours which has six different times zones, I submit it is not perfect. It is a partial solution but I believe we have made some great strides in terms of recognizing each vote as being equal in weight. I wish there were a perfect way we could all finish voting at the same time and all the results would come out at the same time. That would be wonderful. But given the realities of the six time zones, I recognize that even with the present legislation polls in British Columbia will be open for half an hour longer than those in Ontario, Quebec and other provinces.

Yes, by the time the polls close in British Columbia there will be some early results beginning to come out of other regions of the country, principally in Ontario and Quebec. However, I think we have made some progress and I submit this is a partial solution but the best solution we were able to arrive at at this time.

With regard to the confidence in our system, we cannot legislate confidence. Either the confidence is there or it is not. I happen to have all the confidence in the world in our electoral process as it was, as it is now and as it will be further improved with the legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although the hon. member did not mention political party financing and did not answer the question as to whether financing should be provided exclusively by voters or by large corporations, nevertheless, there are certain grey areas in the Canada Elections Act with respect to other expenditures in the course of an election campaign. For instance, certain related expenditures may be made before, during and after an election.

This represents an enormous amount of money for the traditional parties. It may be as much as \$4 million or \$5 million per election, and this is to pay for certain expenses which cannot be specified. I am thinking of polls ordered by political parties and research on which a party like the Liberal Party of Canada or the Conservative Party will spend nearly \$1 million, on both counts, during an election campaign, without any of this appearing in the books of the riding associations or in a candidate's statement.

• (1635)

I would also like to mention volunteer work, not the grass roots volunteers who belong to the organizing committees, people who come and work because they believe in a political party, but the volunteers provided by large lobbying companies. We are given some very striking examples in the Lortie report.

Some companies like Public Affairs International, who are lobbyists, told the Lortie Commission that they had lent as many as six to eight experts in various fields to do partisan work for the benefit of the traditional parties. This work could be worth \$1,000 or \$2,000 daily. Why, when this bill was introduced, did the government not consider revising these grey areas which create an imbalance between the various political parties in this country?

Mr. Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I would first say that the system we are advocating is fair. There is nothing hidden in the funding of political parties. In my election campaign, all contributions are made public, regardless of the amount or the source. There is nothing magic nor hidden, everything is public.

Since 1988, I have had the honour to represent the people in my riding of Stormont—Dundas. At no time have I felt my integrity compromised by contributions to my own or my party's political campaign.

I can say, quite sincerely, that I am fascinated by the way the Bloc members and the members from Quebec handle their financial affairs. It is most interesting, and possibly worth looking into later on.

Today I am perfectly comfortable with the way our political parties are funded. I think we are very fortunate in Canada to be funded by major companies. It means that members like me, without personal means, may be elected.

Under the American political system, for example, Bob Kilger could never be a representative. I could never be, because my pockets are not deep enough to permit me to represent my electors as I can in Canada thanks to the system of funding political parties.

The Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway—youth employment; the hon. member for Rosedale—trade; the hon. member for Davenport—infrastructure program.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

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This bill has been very interesting in a number of respects. Yesterday during report stage we discussed the fact that it is probably one of the most important bills we could have in the House of Commons in that it specifically and directly affects how we vote. Indeed, voting and democracy are absolutely Siamese twins. The two things go together. Therefore how we structure this bill is exceptionally important.

• (1640)

It has been raised a number of times by my colleagues in this House, the reality that this bill came forward rather quickly, that it was in committee only for two weeks, one of which the House was not sitting, and that the government has seen fit in some respects to treat this Chamber once again as a rubber stamp in making sure we have closure so that it gets out of the House in proper jig time.

While I would definitely like to commend the government for having listened during debate and, as a result of that, bringing forward a few meaningful amendments that were proposed under unanimous consent this morning, it must be pointed out that if the process had been better and had allowed sufficient time for there to be proper input and proper thought put into it, I feel this bill would be far better than it is right now.

So while on one side of the coin I do commend the government for listening and then, even after report stage and by unanimous consent from the House, moving some meaningful amendments to the bill, it must be severely criticized for the fact that it put itself into that position.

I particularly want to recognize that the Liberals have removed sex designation from the list that will circulate annually to political parties. The words "sex" or "gender" would appear only on the deputy returning officer's copies. This would allow for two things to happen. First, at the poll the people who are responsible in determining who is in front of them desiring a ballot to cast a vote that the designation would be easier with the gender designation.

Second, although it is just a small thing it is very significant, those women who wish to maintain the confidentiality of their gender in terms of widely circulated lists, that would be respected.

I would also like to take a look at the annual provision of lists. The government whip has gone out of his way, if I understood his speech, to make the point that this annual provision of lists is for a specific purpose. Unfortunately, throughout the entire day I have yet to have a definition of what that specific purpose might be. If the lists are not against this law, but if the lists against this law are not going to be used for purposes other than that for which they are designed, then what is the purpose of the lists? The government has not made that clear at all.

The major bone of contention that I have with this bill is the issue of the staggered voting hours. The government whip went out of his way to say they wanted to make sure that all votes are equal in Canada. I believe all these votes are equal in Canada, notwithstanding that Prince Edward Island has four seats with an average of about 35,000 voters per seat versus most constituencies with about 100,000. There are aberrations in the system but when people go to the polls in Canada they are casting a vote and hopefully an informed vote.

As I said yesterday, it seems to me that what the government has done in this particular case is to respond to a perception of a problem. There is no problem. It has responded to a perception of a problem.

The perception is that for people like me from British Columbia, when the results come on at eight o'clock at night, with the polls having been closed for three hours in Ontario, four hours in the maritimes and four and a half hours in Newfoundland, many of the results are in and therefore the die has been cast. That is a perception.

As we discussed yesterday, the reality is if a person wants to make use of the Internet or of various satellite services or long distance telephones, they can call to eastern Canada and determine which way the vote is going. However, I know full well that for every person who would say that the Liberals are taking all of the seats and we want to get on to the Liberal gravy train so we had better vote for a Liberal, there would be at least a counter balancing number of people who would say that I did not want those scallywags to have the full sway in Ottawa so I am going to make sure there is a counter balance.

• (1645)

This is a perceived problem. In responding to this perceived problem let us take a look at what it will do. The majority of people who will be watching this on television will probably be political wonks. In other words, some of us just love to be in politics and understand what is going on. Certainly for people who read *Hansard* that would be true. The reality is that we need to take a look at what this will do, even those of us who are involved in politics and who take a great interest in politics.

Something occurs on voting day which is completely legal and completely above board. During the course of the campaign political parties will have identified the people who are most likely to support them at the polling stations. By a perfectly legal process they become aware of who has and who has not voted. Obviously there is no way—and there never will be a way—to know how they have voted, but they will know who has or who has not voted. Therefore, if my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca had not voted and I knew that he was going to be voting Reform, my

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supporters would make a point of calling him up and asking him if he needed help to get to the polling station. People are offered rides to get to the polling stations. This type of follow-up occurs.

In Ontario the polls will close at 9:30 p.m. There will be a period of time, from approximately 6:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m., when this kind of activity will take place. For the Liberal Party, the Reform Party and other parties which are well organized in Ontario and have constituency organizations that have identified their voters, this is a bonus. It gives them time to call people, perhaps do some last minute arm twisting and get them out to the polling station. People who cannot be bothered to go out to vote because it is raining or whatever will be contacted and asked if they need a drive or some help to get to the polling station. The parties that are organized in given constituencies will be able to get out the vote.

Contrast the situation in Ontario with that in Vancouver. Vancouver is a very growing, hustling, bustling, congested city. Most people have to commute. Commutes in Vancouver range from an hour to an hour and a half. Even if people get off work at five o'clock in the afternoon, they will probably be coming through their door, looking forward to a cup of coffee and a meal at around 6:30 p.m. Then someone could call them to say: "Rush over to the poll because it is going to close at seven o'clock. You have to get over there to vote". For the person who does not treat their franchise seriously, they will say: "Thank you very much for the call, but I would just as soon sit down and put my feet up".

The difference between the voting patterns in Vancouver and the voting patterns in Toronto, I predict, will be absolutely measurable following the next election. There will not be a disenfranchisement. In other words, the people in Vancouver will still have a 12-hour opportunity. Those who take their voting responsibilities seriously, as all Canadians should, will make sure they get out to vote. However, for those people who require encouragement to vote, that activity will simply not be available in British Columbia which is in the Pacific time zone.

What have we done? We have come up with a perceived problem. We have come up with a chattering kind of a problem. People are saying: "I think this" or "I think that". However, when the average Canadian thinks the entire issue through, the question that they will be able to answer is: Would I actually telephone my brother, my sister, my cousin or my friend in Toronto to see how things went before I cast my vote? The answer dominantly will be no.

• (1650)

Here we have a little wee, tiny, minuscule perceived problem that is now being answered by the government in a very ham-handed way. It is going to change the way in which the political process

occurs on the west coast in comparison with central Canada. That is indeed unfortunate.

It is an example of the flaws in the bill. As essential as some parts of the bill are, in actual fact it is going to change voting patterns in ways that we cannot even define at this time and only as a result of trying to respond to a perceived problem. It is unfortunate that the Liberals continue to use the House as a rubber stamp and have shoved this through under closure.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his previous intervention and also for allowing me to speak for half his time.

I would like to congratulate the government for bringing in Bill C-63. It addresses some of the concerns that Reform has been putting forward. It changes the way in which elections are handled in this country. There are also a number of grave concerns that we have.

Certainly extending the 11-day vacancy period after somebody quits and a byelection needs to be called is a great disadvantage to the parties that are not in power and certainly a great advantage to the government. The 11 days should be extended to at least 30 days, or perhaps even 45 days, to give the parties who are not in power a chance to put together a reasonable election strategy for that byelection. Eleven days enables the government in power to call a snap election and then to manipulate the current system by allowing strategic by-elections to be called to its advantage.

Second, decreasing the electoral period from 47 days to 36 days is a welcome change and enables us to shorten the period of time that exists before the election day. I would also like to congratulate the government on enabling enumeration to take place so we have a permanent election list which is going to save taxpayers a lot of money. That is something which we in Reform completely support.

However, as my counterpart from the Kootenays said, it is extremely important to remove gender because if anybody gets that list, he or she can manipulate the situation. It would enable somebody to identify single women living alone. As a security issue that is certainly important.

All is not rosy with this bill. It contains some measures of which we do not approve. First, the implementation of this bill is far, far too early. When we were supporting this bill we did this in good faith, keeping with the idea that the bill would give all the political parties a fair amount of time to accommodate that within their election strategy. The government in its heavy-handed fashion has chosen to implement this bill in the spring of 1997.

One may say cynically that is politics. The government has to take into consideration the fact that politics may be what it is but at the end of the day we are here to represent the people and to ensure

the people are going to have their democratic rights honoured. This bill does not do that.

We also feel, particularly coming from British Columbia, that the early closure of the polls in B.C. does a huge disservice to the people of that province and of Alberta. Many people work 12 hour days. For example, nurses in hospitals often work from seven in the morning until seven in the evening. Those people will not be able to get out and vote if the polls are closing at 7 and 7.30. Therefore, this aspect of the bill seriously compromises the ability of many Canadians, in particular those living in British Columbia, to have their democratic rights honoured. After all, voting is a democratic right we all share. Many have fought to preserve and enshrine that right within the country, a country that is wonderful and free. However, this bill does not prevent that from happening.

• (1655)

The government also cannot change the rules of the game in mid-stride. What would be fair and equitable not only to the people here but also to all Canadians is to enable this bill to be introduced after the next federal election toward the fall of 1997.

Another aspect which would have shown a great deal of fairness would be to have fixed election dates. We do not have that. It does a great disservice to Canadians and gives an inordinate amount of power to the prime minister of the day.

Fixed election dates would enable all political parties and Canadians to know whether their democratic rights are going to be honoured and when the election is going to be called. It changes the dynamics and enables the public to have a greater amount of power than the present situation where the prime minister of the day controls when the country will have an election.

Another aspect that the government could have shown a great deal of magnanimity about is the issue of referenda, something that we in the Reform Party have championed ever since we came here. Referenda enable the Canadian public to truly exert their democratic will on this House. Referenda will remove power from the Prime Minister's office, remove power from this House and give it to those who should have it the most and that is the people.

Rarely is this tool ever introduced. It needs to be introduced far more. It does not necessarily have to cost more money. Piggy-backing referenda on top of national elections would enable a lot of fundamental questions to be answered and truly enable the Canadian people to be represented within the House in a much more equitable way. That is not happening now.

As I have said before many times, power in this country does not exist in this House. We live an illusion, a house of cards, because a vast amount of power is centred in the hands of the Prime Minister's office, a few cabinet ministers and some of the captains

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of industry. That is where all the major legislative proposals and initiatives are put forward. The rest of this House has to cower underneath that, for those who do not are hammered by the existing whip structure that we have, which is really a perversion of the Westminster system.

The public needs to know this. I believe that the only real time that members exercise their democratic will is every four or five years when we have an election.

In between elections little democratic will is exerted. On the surface it is exerted through committees but by and large committees and members of Parliament, the elected tools of the public, could be far more effective if members and committees were allowed to better represent the Canadian people by giving them far more leniency, far more power, far more ability to address their constituents' concerns and also to be answerable to them.

The issue of recall has not been mentioned which would have been of value. We have a recall system in British Columbia that is by and large unworkable. The Prime Minister could have demonstrated the promise that he made before being elected that he would make this House more democratic. One of those ways would be to give the power to the people to be able to remove an elected member of Parliament that was not doing his or her job. Right now we do not have that, but our country desperately needs it.

The public would have a great deal more respect for the government if the government instituted a very effective and reasonable structure of recall.

• (1700)

I was at the PQ convention in Quebec last weekend. I must say that I was very impressed with the discourse which took place there and the civility of it. I found it interesting that many of the people represented at the PQ convention want the same things that the Reform Party has been putting forward in its plan A which is some reasonable decentralization, to strengthen the federal government where it is doing a good job but to strengthen the provinces to do what they do best.

The inaction of this and previous federal governments has seriously compromised the ability to keep the country together by not addressing that issue and also by not building bridges between the people of Quebec and the rest of Canada. I ask hon. members on both sides of the House to please take heed of that.

Mr. Paul Zed (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate today and to support Bill C-63 as it has evolved during the positive debate and study. Having chaired the committee study and having been a party to the debate in the Chamber, I would like to speak to the perception that this bill

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has been rushed and that opposition concerns have not been given adequate hearing. Before I address these concerns, I would like to respond to some misconceptions about the impartiality of Elections Canada.

My colleague from Bellechasse suggested this morning that there was collusion between Elections Canada and the government. Nothing could be further from the truth. Elections Canada officials have been available to the House and as importantly, to the committee on procedure and House affairs to help us arrive at a good bill which Elections Canada will then administer.

The government would have been remiss in not consulting Elections Canada officials for their expertise on this bill. In fact, as my colleagues opposite will remember, it was Elections Canada officials when they appeared before the procedure and House affairs committee in March this year who prepared a draft piece of legislation which formed part of the genesis of the bill before us today.

I respectfully suggest that the member is misguided in suggesting that the presence in the government lobby of Elections Canada officials would prove his allegation. The truth of the matter is that these officials have been available to all members for the past two days of debate. I might also point out that my hon. colleagues from Bellechasse and Calgary West on numerous occasions have had the opportunity to discuss points of clarification with Elections Canada officials in the government lobby.

With regard to the major thrust of my speech, a careful review of milestones in this phase of reform of the elections system will help illuminate the actual process the bill has followed. Members of the procedure and House affairs committee are well aware of the extensive work that was carried out beginning in 1991 with the Lortie commission.

As colleagues in the House know, this body consulted widely and heard from many witnesses. In their extensive report the commissioners recommended a permanent register and commended for further consideration the concept of shorter voting hours. This latter point was complemented by commission reflections on public attitudes toward shorter campaigns.

Committee deliberations by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform started in 1992 after the Lortie report was received. This work culminated in Bill C-114 which was passed in 1993.

We then moved to the 1993 general election. Elections Canada was able to reuse electoral lists from the 1992 referendum to build the election register as a result of an amendment contained in Bill C-114. This eliminated the need for door to door enumeration in all provinces except Quebec. This was a real cost saving and demonstrated that the list could be reused thereby lending support for the concept of a register.

• (1705)

The next year Elections Canada began to work in earnest on the elections project. Data sources and systems were considered and the provinces and territories were consulted and contacted. I should reiterate the continuing work with and interest of these other levels of government in this cost saving initiative.

My predecessor in the chair of the committee on procedure and House affairs invited Elections Canada officials to several committee discussions which began in April 1995 when the committee gave its concurrence to further work on this issue. Without getting rhetorical, this does not sound like a bill that is being rushed.

December 1995 found Elections Canada back before the committee to provide a progress report and findings. As my colleagues opposite know, when I assumed the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee, I was pleased to chair a meeting in March 1996 where we received the feasibility report on the register project. We had a good discussion in committee. Members were asked to pursue the debate in their respective caucuses and to report back on these discussions.

My personal objective and our objective as a government was to be able to provide additional guidance to the chief electoral officer. I felt this would be important since the feasibility report raised the possibility of a shorter electoral campaign and the prospect of an enumeration outside an election period, a major initiative which is the thrust to build the register and to permit a 36 day campaign. But the feedback was limited. An opportunity seems to have been missed to broaden the consultation on an issue so important to elected representatives in this House now and in the future.

Following the presentation of the feasibility study and the draft bill presented by Elections Canada, a committee of senior officials began to review this matter and allied issues, privacy being one. This work has contributed to the bill we have before us.

The bill was introduced and caucuses were briefed by the leader of the government in the House and by the chief electoral officer. The bill was referred to the committee before second reading. As members are well aware, the government has three legislative paths available to it when introducing a bill: a committee can be asked to develop the bill; a committee can choose the traditional process; or, a bill can be referred to committee before second reading.

Members will know that Bill C-63 was referred to committee before second reading. The fact that the leader of the government is the sponsor of the bill is entirely normal. As the member for Bellechasse pointed out in his much appreciated comments this morning, Bill C-69 was also sponsored by the leader of the government.

The referral to committee before second reading indicates that while the government has made certain decisions about the policy it wished the House to consider, the government House leader and

the government as a whole were prepared to give serious consideration to members' comments about possible improvements to this bill. Referral to committee before second reading both invites those comments and creates the procedural room where necessary to proceed with wide ranging amendments.

Members will know the process has worked in this case. A total of 33 amendments have been made to this bill as a result of this committee process. I will speak to these in a moment. The point is that the bill is better for these amendments. The process chosen by the House leader to study the bill contributed directly to the acceptance of those amendments. Members on all sides of the House who have contributed to these and other suggestions should take pride in their involvement in this process.

As a result of the committee work, the amendments which were made meet express concerns. These amendments include: a provision for staggered voting hours, which came from my colleague from Vancouver; a provision to use provincial lists to build the register; a provision answering concerns of the privacy commissioner and the broadcast arbitrator; a coming into force provision; and a provision to distribute the annual list earlier and to provide a definition of how the list could be used by parties and candidates.

• (1710)

I would like to briefly touch on some of this morning's debate on the use of provincial lists. To reinforce what the leader of the government said, I reiterate that provincial lists will be used to build the first federal register as long as they meet the criteria outlined this morning.

Bill C-63 has from its introduction provided that these lists be used to maintain the register. As a result of debate at report stage and second reading, additional amendments, 19 in total, were made which I believe contribute to the effectiveness of this bill. These new amendments include: provisions concerning the use of gender and date of birth information; revisions to the staggered voting hours; an 11 day waiting period for the calling of byelections to recognize the different dynamics occurring in byelection events; and provisions to provide preliminary electoral lists following the planned last door to door enumeration.

May I also remind the House that we have had an opportunity both in the House and in committee to consider the bill that was brought forward by my colleague from Vancouver East. Any process can be improved but in the case of this bill, we have worked together and we have improved the original bill together. I appreciate that my colleagues on the committee acknowledge this. As my colleague said this morning in quoting an American jurist, we have moved with deliberate speed.

May I take this opportunity to thank my hon. colleague from Bellechasse for his thoughtful and helpful comments. He has

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worked diligently on this bill throughout and he has been open to amendments, even this morning.

The hon. member for Calgary West also deserves our thanks and appreciation. His comments and suggestions in part are reflected in this bill. I believe he has made an important contribution.

I also want to thank our own Liberal colleagues on the committee who have worked diligently, particularly the member for Stormont—Dundas, to bring together the forces that bring us all to this House. Sometimes they are forces of disagreement but no doubt they are forces to put forward good legislation, legislation that has thoughtful and wise amendments and amendments that have come from experience and policy directions of every region of our country representing the linguistic duality and geographic size of our country. I salute him and the other members of our committee.

The government has listened to the comments about this bill and accommodations have been made. This is in keeping with our longstanding approach on electoral issues of providing all members with an opportunity to contribute to developing electoral policy on these particular issues as well as on others.

In conclusion, we are asked to vote on a bill that will make important, practical and desirable changes to the way Canadians vote for those of us asked to represent their interests in this House. I look forward to the earliest implementation of these changes that will modernize and improve Canada's electoral system.

Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know that my colleague who just spoke has so many more notes available to him, I wonder if there might be unanimous consent to permit him to carry on with his speech.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the parliamentary secretary to continue with his speech?

An hon. member: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I hear a no, actually from the same side as the parliamentary secretary.

• (1715)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate all day. I have a very simple question. Why did the government decide that the perceived problem of voters in the west, knowing what eastern voters have decided, could best be solved by putting the western voters at a disadvantage?

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The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but the time has expired. Pursuant to an order made on Monday, November 25 it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

An hon. member: On a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: There are no points of order while the question is being put.

All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen.

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 184)***YEAS****Members**

Adams	Alcock
Arseneault	Assadourian
Augustine	Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre/Sud-Centre)
Baker	Bakopanos
Barnes	Beaumier
Bélair	Bélangier
Bellemare	Bernier (Beauce)
Bertrand	Bethel
Bevilacqua	Bodnar
Bonin	Boudria
Brown (Oakville—Milton)	Brushett
Bryden	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Cannis	Catterall
Chamberlain	Cohen
Collenette	Collins
Comuzzi	Copps
Crawford	Culbert
Cullen	Dingwall
Discepola	Dromisky
Duhamel	Easter
Finestone	Finlay
Flis	Fontana
Gaffney	Gagliano
Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)	Galloway
Gerrard	Godfrey
Goodale	Graham
Gray (Windsor West/Ouest)	Grose
Guarnieri	Harb
Harper (Churchill)	Harvard
Hopkins	Hubbard
Irwin	Jackson
Jordan	Keyes
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas)	Kirkby
Knutson	Kraft Sloan
Lastewka	Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Paul)
LeBlanc (Cape/Cap-Breton Highlands—Canso)	Lee
Lincoln	Loney
MacAulay	MacLellan (Cape/Cap-Breton—The Sydneys)
Malhi	Maloney
Manley	Marleau
Massé	McCormick
McGuire	McKinnon
McLellan (Edmonton Northwest/Nord-Ouest)	McTeague
McWhinney	Mifflin

Milliken	Minna
Mitchell	Murphy
Murray	Nault
O'Brien (Labrador)	O'Brien (London—Middlesex)
O'Reilly	Pagtakhan
Paradis	Parrish
Patry	Peric
Peters	Peterson
Phinney	Pillitteri
Proud	Reed
Regan	Richardson
Ringuette-Maltais	Robichaud
Robillard	Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury)
Serré	Shepherd
Sheridan	Simmons
Steckle	Szabo
Telegdi	Terrana
Torsney	Ur
Vanclief	Verran
Volpe	Walker
Wappel	Whelan
Wood	Young
Zed—135	

NAYS**Members**

Abbott	Ablonczy
Althouse	Asselin
Bachand	Bélisle
Bellehumeur	Benoit
Bergeron	Bernier (Gaspé)
Blaikie	Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Brien	Brown (Calgary Southeast/Sud-Est)
Chrétien (Frontenac)	Crête
Cummins	Dalmond-Guiral
Daviault	de Jong
de Savoye	Debien
Deshaies	Duceppe
Dumas	Duncan
Epp	Fillion
Forseth	Frazer
Gagnon (Québec)	Gauthier
Gilmour	Gouk
Grey (Beaver River)	Grubel
Guimond	Hanger
Harper (Calgary West/Ouest)	Harper (Simcoe Centre)
Hayes	Hermanson
Hill (Macleod)	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hoepfner	Jacob
Johnston	Kerpan
Landry	Langlois
Laurin	Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry)
Lebel	Leblanc (Longueuil)
Lefebvre	Manning
Marchand	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Ménard	Mercier
Meredith	Mills (Red Deer)
Morrison	Nunez
Paré	Penson
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Ramsay	Ringma
Rocheleau	Solberg
Solomon	Speaker
St-Laurent	Strahl
Taylor	Thompson
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)	Tremblay (Rosemont)
Venne	White (Fraser Valley West/Ouest)
White (North Vancouver)	Williams—84

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PAIRED MEMBERS

Canuel	Caron
Chan	DeVillers
Eggleton	English
Fry	Godin
Guay	Lalonde
Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)	Leroux (Shefford)
Loubier	MacDonald
Marchi	Pomerleau
Rideout	Sauvageau
St. Denis	Thalheimer
Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)	Wells

• (1745)

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed.)

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[*English*]

CANADIAN CENSUS

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should return the word "Canadian" among questions of ethnic origin on the Canadian Census.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon. I appreciate the fact that my motion has come forward, Motion No. 277. It is certainly high time that this happened. I am pleased that the House has the opportunity to debate this motion. I am also pleased that it is a votable motion.

I would like to refer specifically to question No. 19, under socio-cultural information, on the long 1996 census form, which asks: "Is this person white, Chinese, South Asian, black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese, Korean or other?"

The list appears to follow no logic. For instance, it mixes skin colour, black or white, with ethnic origin, Chinese, Arab, Filipino, Japanese and Korean, and then geographical origin as well, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Latin American. In addition to those ten categories, one could also identify oneself as other. Under "other" we could assume that someone might put "rosy", "Martian", "Hades" or whatever. Some people might put Canadian and, of course, that is my point today. Many people have done that and I know that many more people will. I trust we will be able, through this motion, to make some changes to that.

• (1750)

Let us must get back to reality. For the first time in Canadian census history Canadians were asked to identify their race. It is a

socially divisive and racist question as well as invasive and offensive. An added insult was the absence of a Canadian category in section 19. In other words, Canadians were asked to deny their own heritage when responding to this question. If Canadian were a choice on this list, as it should be, that is exactly how most people would respond, and in fact many people did in May 1996.

In a note to question number 19 the government defends this socially divisive and racist approach to categorizing Canadians. Section 19 of the census form states: "This information is collected to support programs which promote equal opportunity for everyone to share in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada".

What in the world does that mean? A further explanation is provided in the background information to the census: "The question on visible minority population in Canada provides information for programs under the Employment Equity Act which promotes equal opportunity for everyone". There of course is the nub of the issue.

What do we mean by equal opportunity for everyone? Perhaps we could refer to the Canadian Bill of Rights of 1960 and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982. The Canadian Bill of Rights of 1960 states:

It is hereby recognized and declared that in Canada there have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law; the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law; freedom of religion; freedom of speech; freedom of assembly and association; and freedom of the press.

The Canadian Bill of Rights adopted by this Parliament in 1960, which was opposed by the Liberals, states pretty clearly the true meaning of equality and of being a Canadian. A Canadian to me is anyone who was born in Canada, anyone born to Canadian parents or anyone who has come to Canada and has fulfilled the requirements for becoming a Canadian. It is pretty clear. It is pretty simple: anyone born in Canada, anyone born to Canadian parents or anyone who has come to Canada and has fulfilled the requirements for becoming a Canadian. That is someone who can stand up and say "I am proud to be a Canadian".

But question 19 on the 1996 census form ensures that Canadians must become hyphenated: an Anglo-Canadian, a Franco-Canadian, an Italian-Canadian, a Chinese-Canadian, an Indo-Canadian, a Slavic-Canadian. And on and on it goes; an almost but not quite Canadian, which is shameful.

The government is always expounding on how wonderful Canada is and I know it is a wonderful country, so why not let the citizens of this country preserve their heritage as they see fit? Forget the hyphens and simply say "I am Canadian, period". But

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of course there is nothing in question 19 that enables people to do that.

This social engineering process is sanctioned in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 which states in section 15(1):

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination, and in particular those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

This looks good in principle and on paper and is then followed immediately by section 15(2) which goes on to negate section 15(1):

Subsection 1 does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Of course the question is what is the point of section 15(1) when you look at 15(2). Section 15(2) of the charter emasculates the previous section. It can best be described as the right to discriminate clause. In other words, section 15(1) says that every individual is equal before and under the law until some other person anointed under section 15(2) comes along; then equality becomes expendable.

I am reminded of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* from my teaching career where Napoleon the pig said: "All animals are created equal but some are more equal than others". What a tragedy it was in that book and what a commentary it is on society when we say all are created equal and yet we are sorry, but some are more equal than others.

• (1755)

Section 15(2) legitimizes employment equity, which is a euphemism for quotas, and it should be obliterated from the charter of rights and freedoms. It is a disgrace and a shame to democracy.

This then explains why the government collects information on ethnic origin, because it is required by the social engineers to promote legislatively mandated employment equity programs in the public service and in businesses of 100 or more employees doing business with the Government of Canada. These programs claim to promote equal opportunity for everyone. They do exactly the opposite. It is a concept that is socially divisive and is contradictory to the perception of equality and fairness shared by most Canadians.

Employment equity seeks to confer benefits on members of designated groups which must be identified by the program managers. Many people refuse to self-classify on the form because of a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of colleagues. Most people wish to be chosen on the basis of merit. I would certainly hope that people in this House believe they got here because of merit. It is

sad to say that some are here because they were anointed in their nomination process. That is sadder yet than even what we are talking about today.

The avoidance of self-classification skews the statistical basis in many important ways. It skews the whole thing because some answered and some did not. Yet the social engineers are asking the questions about numbers because they want to determine what their programs will look like. If enough people refuse to classify themselves, the appearance of discrimination is then elevated. There will be a degree of disparity between the number of designated group members in the workforce and the number available to work.

For example, the clerk here in the House of Commons appeared before the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons concerning Bill C-64, an act respecting employment equity. He stated that a voluntary self-identification or a self-classification survey was sent to 1,700 House employees. Only 23 per cent returned the survey and of that number less than 50 per cent identified themselves as belonging to a designated group. What does that do when 1,700 surveys are sent out and 50 come back stating they are not sure about this? Obviously the numbers are going to be skewed and for the social engineers it is going to mess up their figures and programs.

These inaccurate statistics have important consequences for employers. If some members of designated groups refuse to self-classify, employers must consistently report a non-representative workplace. They would then be forced to report non-compliance when in fact they may well be complying. This is clear injustice.

Employment equity action carries with it a presumption of inferiority. It flies in the face of the merit principle. Employment opportunities should be based on the ability to do the job and on that criterion alone.

Is the government saying then that designated groups cannot compete on their own merit? If accident of birth is a qualification for a job then it is an outright mockery of the merit principle. No self-classifying group should accept being treated in this patronizing manner. They should resent all that the employment equity program symbolizes.

The role of government is to ensure equality of opportunity, not equality of results. Bill C-64 was whisked through this House recently and there is also the Canadian census form that so many people have been aggravated about and have been in touch with me. I will bet a dollar that there are a lot of Liberal MPs who should stand up here today and say that they have also received calls from their constituents saying: "I want to represent myself and label myself Canadian. Why can't I do it on the census form?" If they are not coming forward with that information then perhaps the

word smug might come to mind, as if only people in other ridings who are not represented by Liberals would have people outraged.

I know somebody in Edmonton right now who is in the process of being charged. He lives in what is a Liberal held riding for now, but he has said that they have come after him three times and are in the process of charging him. That is shameful. This is a young man who is a Canadian through and through. This is a young man whose heritage is Jewish. However, he said that he was a Canadian under section 19, but they came back to his house time and time again. What is wrong with this picture? Somebody is going to be charged and possibly convicted under this because he stood up and said: "I am a Canadian, period". It is shameful.

• (1800)

For those people who smirk, for those people who think that they have all the answers in the world, something is dreadfully wrong here. I challenge the members across the way to make this right. They could do it in a heartbeat yet I can tell by the looks on their faces they have no intention of doing that, which is sad.

Legalized discrimination invites discriminatory practices. Discrimination in favour of someone logically requires that another be discriminated against. Employment equity legislation officially sanctions discrimination against those groups that are not designated. By putting some people in, by committing, then obviously other people are left out by omitting them.

One group is able bodied white males. We have heard story after story in this place of people who have said that they tried to get into the RCMP or some other group and they simply were not able to do it because there was a quota system.

The government's role should be to ensure equality of opportunity and to protect individuals from discrimination in employment. Instead of predetermined employment results, the government must act as guardian of the merit principle and allow individuals to excel through a fair competitive process. I do not know how anyone in this place could ever deny that.

Employment equity programs are opposed by the majority of Canadians. In a December 1993 Gallup poll, 74 per cent of the respondents said that qualifications should be the sole criteria for hiring for management positions. Many Canadians do not want to be classified by their ethnic origin. In the 1991 census, 765,095 Canadians ignored the ethnic distinctions presented by Statistics Canada and gave Canadian as their sole ethnic origin. The numbers are not out yet from the 1996 census but I am sure they will be way higher than 765,095.

I also question how it can be fairly determined who belongs to visible minority groups. Should a person of racially mixed parentage be counted as a visible minority? Should third generation visible minority Canadians be thought of as disadvantaged in the same way as a new visible minority citizen? What about the

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Caucasian who constitutes a visible minority in certain areas? It is a quagmire and one that could be easily solved by simply putting the word Canadian in section 19.

Studies have shown that Canadian employers are generally fair and that discrimination is not systemic. The Economic Council of Canada undertook a study in 1991 called "New Faces in the Crowd", asserting that there was no significant discrimination against immigrants in general, and no apparent tendency to discriminate against immigrants from the third world. Indeed, the report suggested that immigrants take some time to catch up to native born Canadians because their overseas qualifications do not match those obtained in Canada. This is from the Economic Council of Canada.

In addition, businesses know that having a representative workplace is in their best interests ultimately and of course they are going to want to have that cross-section.

Employment equity breathes resentment toward designated groups. First, it will be assumed that employment was not obtained through the merit principle. Second, it labels them as being inferior and unable to compete on a level playing field. Third, it seems that they need mother government to run interference for them. To me nothing is sadder than that.

The government may have had good intentions when it introduced employment equity legislation which led to this racist and socially divisive question on the census form. I will give the government the benefit of the doubt on that, maybe it was trying to do something good.

I think this legislation is demeaning and detrimental to designated groups and legalizes discrimination against non-designated groups. This kind of legislated mandated social engineering has no place in a democratic country like Canada. It is also a denial of the most basic fundamental right of all Canadians: the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination, one of the basic rights that defines our democracy.

I am one of those designated groups and I find it offensive that I would get some sort of special treatment. I know in many respects women are not treated well in the business world. I know of women who have gone to get business loans from a bank and they have been asked who the man is that is in charge. What a pathetic state it is. We are approaching the new century and we need to be moving forward, yet women are having a problem for instance in getting business loans. That is shameful. Yet I do not think the answer is to have employment equity to label me for instance as a designated group and that I would need special status.

In running as a parliamentarian I can think of nothing sadder than for women on either side of the House to go door knocking and say: "Hello, I am a candidate in your constituency. Please vote for me because I am a woman". I cannot do that. I do not think it would be right for any one of us to do that. As soon as we start

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labelling people and putting them into groups then we leave out other people and it represents a real danger.

• (1805)

All Canadians should be treated equally under the law regardless of what group they belong to. To borrow a phrase from the Liberal majority report in 1992 on the employment equity review, the Liberals said: "The principle of social justice and fairness must always be foremost in the minds of those who draft the laws by which Canadians abide".

If this government is truly committed to the betterment of all Canadians, it must remove the emphasis on race, ethnic and geographical origins from its policies and ensure that hiring and promotion are based solely on the merit principle. A good start would be to include the word Canadian in section 19 of the sociocultural information of the 1996 Canadian census or better still, remove section 19 altogether.

Let us say it together: I am proud to be a Canadian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Motion M-277 put forward by the hon. member for Beaver River. I listened carefully to the comments and relevant remarks she made in this debate. The hon. member for Beaver River raised a number of points.

First of all, Statistics Canada's question no. 19 about ethnic origin makes us wonder if the word "Canadian" should not be just one of the choices on the list census respondents have to choose from.

Personally, what I had the biggest problem with in the points raised by the hon. member for Beaver River is this tendency to standardize everything from coast to coast, so that "Canadian" becomes the obvious choice. Of course, we are Canadians under the law.

But what does "Canadian" mean in terms of ethnic origin? Various groups came to this country at different times in Canadian history. As a small boy, I remember reading in history books that Canada was founded in 1534 when Jacques Cartier planted a cross in Gaspé. We have since learned that there had been people here long before then.

We learned that the Vikings first visited Newfoundland probably as early as the 11th century, and that the First Nations were already established on this land. There has been much denial in our history of the existence of people settling in Canada long before the white man arrived.

To make the origin of Canada coincide with Jacques Cartier's arrival in 1534 is regrettable and, in my opinion, it is a totally racist attitude which quietly became ingrained in our customs. The fact is that this country had people living in it at the time and, therefore, already existed.

However, it is important to look at the notion of ethnic origin. Is a person an Amerindian? Was that person born in France, in Great Britain? What is the origin of his or her name? This information helps us understand, along with statistics, the various contributions made to Canada by immigrants. When I refer to immigrants, this means all of us, even those who were here 400 years ago. Indeed, we all moved here from somewhere else.

There are terms not to be confused, and there is some confusion in the speech made by the hon. member for Beaver River. For one thing, her conclusion on the meaning of the word "Canadian" is not precise enough. This meaning should be explained, and I will do so later by tabling an amendment.

The confusion probably relates to the notion of ethnic origin versus citizenship. Citizenship is a legal status given to the inhabitants of a country, which comes under federal jurisdiction in accordance with section 91 of the 1867 British North America Act.

• (1810)

It is the prerogative of the federal state to grant Canadian citizenship to people who come to live in Canada and who wish to stay here, earn a living and settle permanently in this country. This is one of the criteria to be eligible for Canadian citizenship.

However, we must not confuse citizenship and nationality. If asked what my citizenship is, I must say I am a Canadian, since I was born in Canada and federal laws make me a Canadian citizen. Now, if I am asked my nationality, I am going to reply that I am Quebecois by nationality, because I am attached to the territory of Quebec, to this fledgling country of Quebec, and this is the word with which I identify most strongly. For me, my nation is Quebec.

Another person might define himself as an English Canadian, a French Canadian, someone else might consider himself Acadian, each one defining himself according to his innermost feelings with respect to his origins.

It is a bit the same with the concept of "domicile", which was discussed during the debate on Bill C-63. My colleague from St-Hubert, who sits on my left, is well placed to correct or support me on this, but civil law tells us that the concept of "domicile" we were discussing today comprises a material element, i.e. a physical establishment, as well as an element of intention, i.e. the desire to make that physical establishment one's principal residence. I am not sure if my definition is correct. If not, the hon. member could correct me from her long experience with the law.

As for nationality, there are two elements. There is the material element, the place one lives, and the element of intention, the group with which one most identifies. This is not always an easy matter. Everyone must answer for himself. I cannot answer for others. The hon. member for Beaver River would like the law to answer "Canadians from coast to coast" for all the people questioned, but it is not that simple.

One might well wonder. For example, I see the clerk at the table, Mr. Lukyniuk. With that name, he is probably not from Brittany or Ireland. I would wager that he is probably Ukrainian in origin, but surely now a Canadian. What about his definition of himself? Are we to deprive him of the right to indicate what his origin is, what he or his parents contributed to the wealth and diversity of Canada?

My colleague from Winnipeg North is, quite clearly, not from Alsace or the Walloon part of Belgium, or anything of the sort. If he is able to indicate his origins, all the better. The more information the state has on the origin of its citizens, when they came to Canada, and under what circumstances when that question is appropriate, the more understanding we will have. I believe that information is what is needed to knock down the walls of misunderstanding.

Someone has written a book which is, I think, called "Uneasy Patriot". This book offers us some help in understanding the Canadian reality, the difficulty we sometimes experience in living as Canadians, the means we have developed to resolve certain conflicts. It is not always easy, but we have created a traditional approach that will work in the best of times as well as the worst of times, when the social fabric is under severe tension.

We experienced this on October 30 last year, when Quebec went to the polls. I am convinced that this ability to absorb, this democratic fabric we have woven together for generations evolved very gradually. Despite certain alarmist statements made from time to time, we have developed a tradition of tolerance in Canada which enables us to accept change, provided it is done democratically.

There are several examples of this. In 1992, when the Charlottetown accord was rejected, all governments campaigned in favour of accepting the offer except one, the Government of Quebec. The accord was massively rejected. The next day, people were not marching in the streets to demand the government's resignation, to get rid of the government. We have a tradition of respect for the results of a democratic vote, and that is how we developed a great capacity for tolerance.

• (1815)

To recapitulate: We should not be stuck in a definition of "Canadian" which we would be unable to get out of, the excuse being that everything has to be Canadian so that it becomes impossible to specify what kind of Canadians we are. As far as Statistics Canada is concerned, we must not confuse citizenship with ethnic origin and nationality.

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Therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member for Saint-Hubert:

That the motion be amended by replacing all the words after the word "should" with the following:

"include "Canadian", "Quebecker", "English-Canadian", "French-Canadian" and "Acadian" among questions of ethnic origin on the Canadian Census."

The Deputy Speaker: I can inform the hon. member for Bellechasse that his motion is in order.

[*English*]

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a proud Canadian. I chose Canada to be my country. I rise in debate today in full knowledge of my Canadian pride.

The motion tabled by the Reform member for Beaver River states:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should return the word "Canadian" among questions of ethnic origin on the Canadian Census.

On the surface, it sounds innocuous to public good. Examined closely, it is harmful to good citizenship.

I am proud to be a Canadian citizen. If I am asked what is my ethnic origin, I will proudly answer "Filipino". Yes, I was born in the Philippines. My colour is brown, "kayumanggi" in my native tongue.

Speaking of languages, neither English or French is not my mother tongue. Tagalog is. I had to learn English in school. Now I am studying French.

These are some characteristics of my ethnic origin, my ethnocultural background, my roots. I am proud of my Filipino heritage. They are a people known for their hospitality, their work ethic, their creativity and determination, and their generosity of heart.

At the same time, I am proud to be a Canadian by choice. I am proud not only because of the physical beauty of our country—its immense geography, beautiful lakes, beautiful scenery, majestic mountains, surrounding oceans and rich natural resources—and not only because of Canada's economic wealth, important as it is. I am proud primarily because of the beauty of our people. We are diverse in cultures, yet we live in harmony. We are a people of varied ethnic origins, yet we share a common national vision. I approach this motion secure in the knowledge that Canada is a nation of human achievement.

I have with me a copy of the May 14, 1996 census questionnaire. It gives the reasons for which the questions were asked. The member for Beaver River should have carefully studied the document. It outlines clearly the nine steps to answering the questionnaire.

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When one correctly answered the questions in steps No. 1 to No. 5, only Canadian citizens and immigrants would be proceeding to answer the questions in the subsequent steps. When one correctly answered the question in step No. 7, the respondent would have answered questions about Canadian citizenship. Thus, by the time the person was answering the question on ethnic or cultural identification, he or she would have been identified in answer to the earlier question as being Canadian or not. Hence, to require that the word "Canadian" be returned among questions of ethnic origin on the Canadian census as the motion before us insists would not only result in confusion but would create a redundancy that no one would wish to happen.

• (1820)

There was a purpose or set of reasons for every question, namely to serve public policy and public programs and public good. The question on ethnic origin of Canadians, specifically question No. 19, was not about whether we are Canadians or not. It was not intended to measure national identity or national pride. In fact, this question was asked to be answered after the respondent had identified himself or herself as a Canadian.

To have listed Canadian for question No. 19 would not make it possible to determine the numbers and characteristics of the visible minority population, the essential purpose of this particular question, to serve a legitimate public policy.

Answers to question No. 19, along with other related questions, provide information needed to deal with many vital economic and social policy issues of concern to Canadians. This particular question was adopted for the 1996 census after rigorous consultation and testing, a process which clearly documented that accurate data would be produced and that respondents clearly understood the question and did not react negatively to it.

One cannot help but sense that the criticism to question No. 19 about ethnic origin is directed more at the idea of employment equity rather than at the collection of statistical data. But the Reform Party had already lost this debate in the House of Commons.

For example, when the member was speaking about the able-bodied white Canadians that are excluded from the Employment Equity Act, I have to tell the member about simple arithmetic. If you target equal opportunities for a fraction of 100, as in the act, the remainder of the citizens of this country, the able-bodied white males, are included in this act. It is only simple arithmetic. It is a lesson in fractions. It is a lesson in proportion.

The Employment Equity Act has been a federal law for a decade now and the census is the only possible source of objective information needed to administer the act and to evaluate its impact

over a period of time. It is therefore in the interest of everyone, including this member, who wishes to debate this issue, to have objective census data rather than biases and unfounded opinion.

We should remind ourselves that we have a federal law on multiculturalism. It is about the balance of rights and obligations, about managing Canada's diversity in the interests of the individual Canadian and of Canada as a whole, about accepting the contribution of all her people and providing them with the opportunity to participate fully in Canadian citizenship. Section 27 of the charter of rights and freedoms guarantees to preserve and protect the multicultural heritage of our nation.

It is a given that we must have objective data to serve good public policy. Statistics Canada has always been ranked by international panels of statisticians as the best in the world. While we should be vigilant of every department, we should do so not to the point of partisanship which can only destroy.

The motion before us impugns unkindly the international distinction that Statistics Canada has justly earned. Worse, the motion before us is an insult to common sense.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission said in its recent report to Parliament: "Asking question No. 19 is entirely reasonable in a pluri-cultural society which needs to understand itself". Understand each other we must.

I am, you may say, Mr. Speaker, a Filipino Canadian. Whether the two words are separated by a hyphen or a space does not detract from my loyalty to Canada, from my pride in Canadian citizenship, a citizenship that I will serve in peace, a citizenship that I will serve in war.

• (1825)

This is true, irrespective of our origin. It is true of my wife Gloria with whom I immigrated to Canada in 1968. This is true of our four sons, who all were born in Winnipeg and are Canadians by birth. They too are proud of the Filipino heritage of their parents' roots.

I conclude by saying that our diversity is and should be a source of national pride for all of us. We are a model to the world. Canada has shown the world that co-habitation of cultures is the strength of the Canadian federation and inherent in this national achievement are the unifying forces of universal values.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to add my words to this debate in support of the motion by my hon. colleague from Beaver River.

The motion states:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should return the word "Canadian" among questions of ethnic origin on the Canadian Census.

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The recently submitted Bloc Québécois amendment would add behind the word Canadian: Québécois, English Canadian, French Canadian, Acadian and I am not sure what else.

It is interesting that the Bloc Québécois, the separatists in the House and in this country, are endeavouring this evening to explain to Canadians what Canadian means. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

As well, I listened with great interest to the member who just spoke. I am pleased that he is so proud of his heritage. A lot of immigrants who come to this country are proud of their individual heritages. They come to Canada from countries around the world. But there are also Canadians who are proud to be Canadian. We would like to be known as Canadians and be registered as Canadian.

For the hon. member to say in his remarks that the motion is an insult to common sense is complete and utter rubbish. The motion is common sense. I only wish I could do as good a job as the hon. member for Beaver River did during her remarks to this motion this evening.

The motion seeks to bring some logic to the issue of racism and equality. On the one hand, Canadians are striving to eliminate discrimination based on ethnic origin or skin colour, to say first and foremost that we are all Canadians and are equally deserving of the rights, privileges and pleasures that come with being Canadian.

On the other hand, the federal government demands that individuals distinguish themselves by their skin colour, ethnic or geographic origin, to stand up and be counted as different.

In the 1996 census, respondents are not even given the opportunity to identify themselves as Canadian. Census question 19, in fact the entire long form of the 1996 census, stirred up a great deal of controversy in my constituency of Prince George—Peace River and across the country. The member for Beaver River referred quite eloquently to the problems that this question and the whole issue stirred up. People are simply furious about this and they are demanding change. However, we cannot expect common sense from the government.

I cannot help thinking whenever I address this issue of how the writings of George Orwell apply to the 1996 census. For the one in five Canadians who were required by law to complete the long form it must have seemed as though big brother was indeed watching over them.

I recall that in the year 1984, many social analysts celebrated the fact that the oppressed society predicted in Orwell's book *1984* had little resemblance to real life. Ha. However, I cannot ignore how millions of Canadians felt about the invasive questions asked of them by their big brothers in the federal government this past spring. With their privacy seriously jeopardized by questions that ranged from income, all types of household expenses, race, colour,

et cetera, these Canadians faced fines or jail if they did not answer the questions.

• (1830)

In addition, as my colleague from Beaver River mentioned in her remarks, the specific application of the book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell to the 1996 census is even more frightening. She cited the quote that all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others. It would appear that the federal government's discriminatory practice of conferring special status means that all Canadians are equal, it is just that some Canadians are more equal than others.

I suggest that some hon. members take the opportunity to refresh their schoolday memories and pick up copies of these two books. We are always searching for quick examples to give our children when they complain that their math lessons and required English readings have little relevance to real life. Ironically, I did not expect that we would be able to tell them that *Animal Farm* and *1984* are books that bear such similarities to life in 1996.

While census data may appear to some as simply statistics and record keeping, keep in mind that these data are used by all sorts of different groups and individuals for all kinds of purposes, including employment equity legislation, funding programs and tax benefits, to name but a few.

One of the reasons "Canadian" was eliminated as a category in the 1996 census was that 3 per cent of respondents to the 1991 census reported themselves as being Canadian. Apparently this caused a great deal of difficulty for Stats Canada in interpreting the results because it was under pressure to produce these statistics for use in employment equity programs and other initiatives. So the federal government's answer was to simply eliminate the option of identifying oneself as Canadian.

What happened to the 3 per cent of people who identified themselves as Canadian? Statistics Canada's difficulty in interpreting the results makes me wonder how accurately census data reflect our society. The fact that Stats Canada has also admitted that 10 per cent of the aboriginal population in this country was not enumerated in the 1991 census shakes my confidence in its results even further.

When we consider this information will be used to determine employment equity figures until the year 2003, it is a wonder how anyone either for or against employment equity can trust these data to be used for that purpose.

The very idea that the federal government encourages hiring on anything other than the basis of merit is preposterous. But of course we have all become quite accustomed to hearing special interest groups and Liberal MPs extolling the virtues of these so-called equal opportunity initiatives. Employment equity creates resentment in the workplace and widens the gap of understanding

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between races and ethnic groups. It accomplishes not harmony but discord.

I believe that one large misconception on the part of some members in this House is that minority groups are in favour of this type of government action. However, many individuals are reluctant to identify themselves as a member of a minority group. The 1992-93 report on employment equity in the public services states that the number of visible minority employees may be under identified by one and a half times. Many individuals do not wish to identify themselves as members of a particular race or ethnic group either because they wish to be considered on the basis of merit alone or because they do not wish preferential treatment over their colleagues.

Furthermore, in my home province of British Columbia just 11 per cent of those asked in a December 1993 Gallup poll supported employment equity initiatives. As we are all well aware, British Columbia is fortunate to be home to a cosmopolitan society that is enriched by a skilled population that represents a broad range of visible and cultural minorities. Based on this poll it is obvious that many of the individuals in those groups themselves do not feel there is a need for employment equity.

Employment equity legislation and any other program or initiative that gives preferential treatment to a group or individual based on physical, social or cultural characteristics is discrimination.

• (1835)

That is the definition of the type of discrimination we are talking about today, giving one individual preferential treatment over another on the basis of skin colour or country of birth.

Another obvious practice by the federal government that confers special status and preferential treatment is an archaic act of Parliament that grants one group of Canadians special tax exemptions based on their race and place of residence. I am of course referring to the Indian Act.

I would like to go on and on about the need for the reform of the Indian Act and other archaic pieces of legislation that exist in this country and need to be overhauled but I simply do not have the time.

It is not simply question 19 of the 1996 census that is the problem. It is the socially divisive initiatives that will be driven by the responses to this question. If Canadian were to be included as a category it would be a good first step in breaking down the walls of racism and discrimination.

This motion is an opportunity to make real headway in the war against racism and discrimination. It is action that is based on reality. When we are done with the debate today on this motion and because it is votable, as the hon. member for Beaver River has indicated, I certainly encourage all hon. members from both sides of the House to support this motion and return the option of

registering oneself as truly Canadian to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to Motion No. 277 which calls for the government to include the word "Canadian" on the question concerning ethnic origin in the census.

First, I would like to point out that for a number of censuses respondents have been able to respond "Canadian" to the ethnic origin question. This question appears only on the long form questionnaire which goes to 20 per cent of the population. In the 1996 census conducted last May, "Canadian" was listed among the examples provided as possible answers to the question on ethnic or cultural origins.

The census has played an important role in the development of Canada. For more than 100 years, the census has informed us about the social and economic development of our country and on the evolving diversity of our population. For the last four censuses, it has provided statistics reported on the number of people who reported Canadian as their only ethnic origin.

I would like to assure the House that Statistics Canada is committed to developing census questions that meet the highest priority needs of data users. Prior to every census, Statistics Canada consults interested Canadians throughout the country in government, in community associations and as interested citizens in an effort to identify information requirements which might best be addressed through the census.

For each census, Statistics Canada carefully tests and evaluates all the proposed questions. For the 1991 census the ethnic origin question went through a particularly rigorous consultation, testing, review and approval process. This process ultimately included approval by cabinet and the prescription of the questions by the governor in council as required by the Statistics Act.

The increasing diversity of Canada's population, coupled with the increasing number of persons who chose to report Canadian as their only ethnic origin in 1991, led Statistics Canada to undertake further consultations and testing on the ethnicity question. This ensured that the census would continue to meet the important needs for accurate data on the composition and characteristics of the population. As a result, the question was modified again for the 1996 census.

Testing of the modified question indicated that people clearly understood the question and that it would produce accurate data. The 1996 ethnic origin question included as examples of possible answers the most frequently reported ethnic origins from the 1991 census. Canadian was among the examples provided since Canadian was the fifth most often reported ethnic origin in the 1991 census. Respondents could report up to four ethnic origins in the space provided. Canada is a country populated by aboriginal peoples, immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. Indeed,

census data show that our population includes people with more than 100 different ethnic and cultural origins. We are all proud of both our heritage and of Canada.

• (1840)

The government acknowledges that for some Canadians the ethnic origin question is a sensitive one. It can be associated with emotional issues such as personal identity, national unity, patriotism or fear of oppressive regimes in former homelands. Nevertheless, many Canadians are proud to report their ancestry or ethnic origins on the census, and indeed are anxious to do so. For them it is a straightforward and simple question.

For others whose families may have been in Canada for many generations or who no longer have any connection to their country of origin, the question may be difficult to answer or may be considered irrelevant. For this and a variety of other reasons many people choose to report their ethnic origin as Canadian and nothing else. The census has provided them with the opportunity to do so and the results have been published.

Since 1981 Statistics Canada has published the number of people who chose to report their ethnic origin as Canadian. This number has been increasing and has reached 765,000 in 1991. As I mentioned earlier, Canadian was the fifth most frequently reported ethnic origin in 1991.

As in past censuses, Canadian was a valid answer to the ethnic origin question on the 1996 census. The data are now being tabulated and will be published as soon as the results are available. Adding or changing questions on the census form is not a task that Statistics Canada takes lightly. The agency must tread a fine line to accommodate many different needs, balancing the many conflicting demands for information with the need to minimize the reporting burden and the intrusion on the privacy of Canadian citizens.

The census provides information which is vital to virtually every sector of society. Census data are used in the administration of more than 80 federal and provincial legislative measures and support critical decision making by private industry and by every level of government throughout the country.

Throughout the years census data on ethnic origin have been of widespread interest to federal departments, provincial, territorial and municipal governments as well as agencies and companies of every kind. In fact, these data are among the most widely used data from the census. The data are used to help immigrants integrate into Canadian society, to plan heritage and multicultural programs and to deliver services to an increasing, diverse population.

Statistics Canada has a proven method of treading the fine line between meeting data needs and minimizing the burden on the

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public. The Canadian census enjoys wide approval and support from the public and from data users. This House should not get involved in the difficult and complex business of survey design. Rather, we should leave this task to Statistics Canada. Let us give the agency the chance to review the results of the 1996 census and then design and test questions leading to the submission of proven workable proposals for review and approval of cabinet as required by the Statistics Act.

I am confident that the agency can formulate questions that make sense to respondents and still supply the data needed to inform the decisions of government, industry and individual citizens in the first decade of the next century. No decision should be made about the content of the 2001 census at this time. As Canada enters the 21st century it is important that the census questions keep pace with the changes in our society. Consultations for the 2001 census as well as the evaluation of the 1996 census results will bring many new ideas to the forefront, including the need for the collection of statistics on the ethnic origins of the population. The cost of the census and the burden on the respondents must be taken into account before any decision is made to add or to change questions.

• (1845)

I call on members of the House to reject Motion No. 277 and leave this difficult job to Statistics Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary North will have the floor when this matter comes back for debate.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to follow up on a question which I asked at the beginning of October concerning the very difficult situation facing Canada's young people, in particular the absolutely unac-

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ceptable level of unemployment which in real terms is in excess of 20 per cent for young people.

Members of the House will recall that a little over three years ago the Liberal government was elected on a promise of jobs. The red book promised jobs and a new hope for change from the Conservative government. Instead, what we have seen are levels of unemployment particularly among young people which are even higher than they were when this government was elected. In fact in September alone over 19,000 jobs were lost in the age group of 15 to 24.

There is a growing insecurity which young people are facing as they look at their futures. The very tragic unemployment situation is completely unacceptable.

I spoke earlier today at the conference celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Canadian Federation of Students. The chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, Brad Lavigne, spoke out strongly earlier this year on this issue. He said: "Where are the red book promises of jobs, jobs, jobs? Instead of creating jobs, the Liberals have made cuts to the public sector and pursued a destructive high interest rate policy. That is not a long term approach to jobs".

Young people today are facing soaring tuition fees, except in the province of British Columbia. The New Democratic government in that province has actually frozen tuition fees for this year, next year and the following year. Students are facing increasing debt loads. The average debt load of a graduating student is about \$24,000.

There have been cuts in research and development. That is not what the Liberal government was elected to do, certainly not to cut funding for example in research for environmental technologies. There has been no renewal of the national AIDS strategy.

Cuts have been made in arts and cultural programs and to the CBC.

All of this has directly affected the opportunity of young people to find meaningful jobs in our economy.

Young people are looking for tax relief in the education system. I appeal to the government to listen carefully to the Canadian Federation of Students' request for tax relief and also for an academic component to any infrastructure program.

The fact is that there are too many young people who not only cannot find work but who are underemployed. For example, there is the physicist who is driving a cab in Toronto and cannot find any other work and the historian who is delivering pizzas.

There is a tremendous amount of insecurity, not only about jobs, but because of the growing number of part time jobs, contractual jobs and temporary jobs, more and more young people do not have jobs which will provide them with decent pensions. At the same

time, the Canada pension plan is under attack. The Reform Party suggests that we wipe out the Canada pension plan and replace it with super RRSPs. The Liberal Party talks about cutting the benefits of the Canada pension plan and increasing the age of retirement. Now is the time for us to be reaffirming our support for the Canada pension plan and strengthening it as a very important social insurance program.

There are fewer summer jobs for students. There are fewer part time jobs. There is a lot of pressure on them.

• (1850)

What this country needs is a government that is committed to full employment, committed to putting jobs at the heart of its economic strategy. There are many ways of doing that. One is a fair tax system. The national leader of the New Democratic Party, Alexa McDonough, has been travelling across the country getting out the message that there are alternatives.

It is time that this country had a government that did not just listen to the wealthy and the powerful. It is time that we had a government that put young people and employment of young people at the heart of its economic policy.

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed helping young Canadians make the transition into the workforce has been a priority of this government.

This is an obvious statement in that the 1996 budget reallocated some \$315 million of budget savings to help create employment opportunities for young Canadians over the next three years. This included, contrary to what the member just said, a doubling to \$120 million of the 1996-97 contribution to student summer placement initiatives which enabled the creation of more than 60,000 summer employment placements this past summer.

In addition through our Canada employment centres for students, some 664,000 students have benefited from a variety of other employment measures since 1994. Youth Service Canada has already given some 5,200 young Canadians the opportunity to learn work related skills and life skills while engaging in community service activities across the country. Youth Internship Canada will provide over 35,000 youth with the opportunities to gain employability skills and work experience that will help them get and keep a job. In total more than 430,000 young Canadians will benefit from this government's youth programs this year alone.

As the hon. member is aware, the Government of Canada appointed a ministerial task force on youth to obtain input from Canadians on how to help young people make a successful transition into the labour market. Furthermore this government has also made public its intention to introduce a program to help students better manage their Canada student loan debts.

This is what we have started to do for young Canadians. We will continue to examine ways of supporting youth so that they can succeed in the future.

[Translation]

TRADE

Mr. Bill Graham (Rosedale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I had the opportunity to question the Minister for International Trade on the signing of the free trade agreement between Chile and Canada, he situated this agreement to some extent within the context of Canada's general international trade in his response.

I think we must look at this agreement in the context of what we are doing in Canada to diversify our trade with the United States and to find new markets, especially markets opening up in the Asia-Pacific region and in Latin America. In this context, it seems to me that Chile is very important, because it is now associated with Mercasur, an association of four Latin American countries: Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil.

If we really intend to create a free trade zone in the Americas by 2005, as stated in Miami a year ago, we must remember that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of international trade and the signing of agreements like the one we have with Chile.

[English]

In that context I would like to pursue my question of the minister. In his answer to my question, he specifically said that he perceived that the additional advantage this agreement would bring to this country would be in the areas of investment, tariff reduction and perhaps serving as a model whereby the United States would be brought into this process.

Clearly tariff reduction is there. That is a factor in every agreement of this nature, so let us leave that aside and speak for a moment on both the investment issue and the American issue. I would like to ask additional questions of the parliamentary secretary.

• (1855)

How do we see Chile in terms of its investment regulations? My understanding is that when the tesobonos problems arose with Mexico it shook the very foundations of the financial markets of Latin America. Chile was one country which survived that experience precisely because it had in place investment controls which were more strict than those of other Latin American countries. Mexico in fact collapsed and then Argentina very nearly collapsed on top of it, but Chile survived.

Surely it would seem to me that when we enter into an agreement with Chile that we would want to reinforce and enable that type of

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arrangement to be in place. We would be a part of it and we would relate that to the International Monetary Fund and other monetary policies. That is certainly an issue which I think is preoccupying for many of us when we look at this agreement.

Perhaps more preoccupying is the role of the United States in this. It is clear that it would be beneficial to bring the United States into this agreement. It is clear that if free trade of the Americas is going to be realized by the year 2005, an essential first step is to bring in the United States.

Will the United States be brought in with environmental and labour standards side agreements such as those we have insisted on in NAFTA? My understanding is that the present political climate in Washington is that an ever increasingly conservative Congress will resist a great deal any suggestion by the administration that we should have side agreements of this nature attached to the Chile agreement.

It seems to me that if ultimately Chile is going to be a part of NAFTA, then we have to incorporate into its arrangements with us these very important agreements because we are all concerned with the problem of the harmonization of standards.

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, the member's time has expired.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try to answer the member as best I can.

The recently signed Canada-Chile free trade agreement is an important development for Canadian businesses. With this agreement Canadian exporters will gain significant access to one of the region's fastest growing economies and a gateway to all of Latin America.

All Canadian exports are currently subject to an 11 per cent duty when they enter Chile. This agreement paves the way for increases in trade with Chile by eliminating the duty for roughly 75 per cent of current Canadian exports to Chile. The agreement will mean immediate duty free access on goods such as telecommunications equipment, electrical generating equipment, mining and forestry equipment, durum wheat, barley, lentils and maple syrup. A further 15 per cent of current Canadian exports will have duty free access within five years.

Since 40 per cent of our GDP depends on trade, an agreement such as this one is essential for the creation of jobs and growth.

[Translation]

Furthermore, if Chile provides, for key products, improved access to other countries where Canadian products cannot enter duty free, this ensures that Canada will also enjoy improved access.

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Elimination by both sides of anti-dumping measures will guarantee free access for Canadian exports and move forward the international reform of anti-dumping measures.

[English]

Cultural industries and the autopact are exempted from this agreement and social services and health care are fully protected. High tariffs for dairy, poultry and eggs over quota are preserved.

We have signed side agreements on labour and the environment that provide us with the new mechanisms to seek to influence Chilean policies in these important areas.

This bilateral agreement is a step toward fulfilling Canada's broader trade policy objective of promoting hemispheric trade liberalization under the FTAA. This free trade agreement will be a bridge to Chile's accession to NAFTA. Canadian exporters will have an important advantage over the United States, Asia and Europe in the Chilean market. This will give Canadian exporters a head start on their U.S. competitors when Chile does eventually join NAFTA.

The Canada-Chile free trade agreement sends an important message to our trading partners that Canada is prepared to take the lead in creating a freer trade environment throughout the world.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I asked the President of the Treasury Board whether in view of the 10 per cent unemployment rate in Canada the government intends to launch a new infrastructure program this winter.

In 1993 the Canada infrastructure works program was a rightful promise kept by the government within weeks of taking office. The result of this joint federal-provincial-municipal program has been the creation of over 110,000 jobs for Canadians, all for the purpose of improving Canada's infrastructure and enhancing the skills and technological expertise of Canadians.

Before the infrastructure program, unemployment stood at 11.4 per cent. Today it is at 10 per cent with youth unemployment around 14 per cent. We need more job creation by government if we are to cope with almost jobless growth.

Today about 97 per cent of the \$6 billion in federal, provincial and municipal funding has been committed. Consequently we need to prime the pump. Again, we need a new infrastructure program with the same funding formula as the first but with new goals. For instance, we could target new infrastructure funds for energy

efficient investments, to make buildings more efficient, to reduce energy consumption and CO₂ emissions. This would create jobs for Canadians in the construction trades and environmental technology fields.

The Canadian Home Builders Association estimates that for every \$10,000 spent on a renovation, half a person year of direct employment is created. Increased funding for the residential rehabilitation assistance program would be a good vehicle both for creating jobs and increasing energy efficiency because it aims at improving the safety, health and energy efficiency of older buildings, structures and homes across the country.

A new infrastructure program would help stimulate private sector job creation and community initiatives. Again I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board: Does the government intend to launch a new infrastructure program this winter?

Mr. Ovid L. Jackson (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the chance to respond to my colleague, the hon. member for Davenport. My friend asks if the government intends to launch a new infrastructure program.

The Prime Minister first invited provincial premiers at the first ministers' meeting in June 1996 to consider renewal of the infrastructure program.

At the October 4 meeting of the Minister of Finance and his counterparts, the federal government outlined what its position would be if the program were to be renewed. This position included the following points: The federal government will fund no more than one-third of the total program in every province. The program will continue to be focused primarily on improving municipal infrastructure. The financial participation of the private sector will be actively encouraged.

In order to contribute to job creation programs, funds should be incremental. Infrastructure investments should also have a strategic focus on the 21st century by improving the conditions for medium and long term job creation, enhancing competitiveness. And the program would continue as a national program. We will not proceed without the full participation of all provinces.

Since that meeting the media has reported that British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario are now onside to join the new infrastructure program. However, provinces have not yet indicated they are ready to increase their overall capital spending on infrastructure to match federal contributions for the new program.

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The premiers' deadline of November 1 for the report back from their finance ministers has passed. However, we are still waiting to hear something official from the provinces.

With respect to the renewal of the program, any decision to extend it must be taken in the context of fiscal realities, and in light of the objectives of both the provinces and the government.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is deemed to have been adopted. The House stands adjourned until 2 p.m. tomorrow.

(The House adjourned at 7.03 p.m.)

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